

Studies in Ethnic Literature

ENG 250

Assistant Professor Janet M. Hagen

Office: C216

Office hours: Tuesday 2:30 - 3:30

Thursday 2:30-5:30

(and by appointment)

Email: jhagen@trcc.commnet.edu

Phone: (860) 892-5738

Course Content

This course provides a cultural analysis of literature written by "ethnic" authors in the United States whose particular American experiences have shaped a truly diverse American identity but yet whose contributions to American literary studies have often been relegated to the margins. Central concerns we will focus on are what it means to be American and what it means to struggle for a cultural identity within a homogenized American society. We will also focus on how gender, class, and sexuality intersect with race and ethnicity in ways that both complicate and enrich this struggle and our understanding of it. Throughout the semester we will be asking what "Ethnic Literature" means and why it is separated into its own class and what the political implications are of separating ethnic writers from the traditional literary canon, and, what (if anything), ties all these writers together.¹

Course Outcomes

In order to improve interpretive reading and writing skills you will:

1. Read and discuss selected works on various interpretive levels both in large and small groups.
2. Ask thought-provoking questions that lead to a deeper reflection and understanding of the works.
3. Analyze the components of various writing styles and their influence on respective texts.
4. Write frequently in and outside of class.
5. Apply various critical strategies to analyze literature, for example (but not limited to), post-colonial, gender, formalist, and cultural.
6. Recognize when it is appropriate to use secondary sources and then use them effectively.
7. Produce documents that adhere to MLA writing conventions.

Required Texts and Resources

- *The Brief Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz
- *Power* by Linda Hogan
- *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* by Maxine Hong Kingston
- *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry
- *Growing up Ethnic in America: Contemporary Fiction about Learning to be American*
Ed. Maria Mazziotti Gillan and Jennifer Gillan
- <http://www.poets.org>

Grade Percentages

Essays			
1	20%	Peer review	10%
2	25%	Class participation, poetry selections, questions, & in-class writing	25%
		Group presentation	20%

EXPLANATION OF ASSIGNMENT AND GRADES

ESSAYS (45)%: During this session you will be required to write two formal essays. The essay assignments will be handed out in class and will require the use of secondary sources (which will be turned in with your essays in your folder).

PEER REVIEW (10%): Before turning in your essay, you will be required to develop a formal typed draft of your essay to bring to class for a peer review workshop (along with copies of your draft to share with your peers). (Number of copies is designated on syllabus.) This draft should be the best essay you can write and should be **completed** with the assigned amount of pages typed. In class you will be assigned into groups, where you will be responsible to give feedback to your peers based on the requirements I will explain and hand out during that class period. After you receive written input from your peers, it is expected you will then revise your essay. You will be graded on how effectively you review your peers' essays. ***If you miss a peer review day or come to class without a fully typed draft for review and the required amount of copies, you will not be able to participate in peer review and it will affect your grade negatively.*** (You will not be allowed to leave class to go make copies. You must be prepared at the **beginning** of class.) Finally, when you turn in your final paper you will need to place it in a pocket folder with the original essay (before peer review), the peer reviews, and your final essay to be graded.

Paper Format: All formal essays are to be typed, double-spaced (not triple or two-and-half spaces), with one inch margins and fonts no larger than 12 points. (A good example of what I will be expecting is font the size of Times New Roman 12.) Be forewarned that if you include extra spaces between paragraphs or type in extra large margins or fonts, etc., your paper will be returned without a grade or it will affect your grade negatively. All essays **must** follow MLA citation format (the citation format you learned in English 101 and 102). ****Pet Peeve: Sloppy papers. It is your job to proofread your paper. If I can't read your paper due to careless errors such as spelling mistakes, I will return it.***

CLASS PARTICIPATION AND QUESTIONS (25%): A literature course such as this requires class discussion, with your input vital for the success of the course. Thus, I will expect that you will have read the assigned material before class and will be able to fully participate, individually and, if designated, in a group.

Thought-Provoking Questions: To get at the different meanings in literature, a reader must learn how to read closely. Part of reading closely demands being able to pull out the key issues through the asking of difficult questions – questions that go beyond the surface to explore deeper issues and conflicts. Therefore, every week I will expect you to turn in thought-provoking questions on each work assigned. (Questions must also demonstrate that you have read the material and have thought of the questions on your own.) (Please see syllabus for required amount.) **These questions are to be turned in at the beginning of class.** (Please deposit them on my desk.) You will not be allowed to turn in questions once class starts, nor will you be able to turn in questions late (after class). I will use these questions to guide our discussion, so I will expect that you will have put some time and thought into their creation. Questions should

be typed. HINT: I take these questions very seriously, and so should you. If you ask a simple question that can be answered with a simple directive statement, your grade will be affected negatively. I will begin collecting questions week two (next week). Questions will be graded either with a check plus (excellent), check (average), or a check minus (below average). (If you must miss class, questions must be turned in before class for credit [unless you have an excused absence].)

Poetry: During the semester, you will be required to research and bring in poems that you would consider "ethnic" poetry. (I'll be assigning you a number on the first day of class. When your number is identified on the syllabus, it is your day to bring in a poem.) Requirements: bring in copies of the poem to read and share with the class. Be prepared to give a brief summary of who the author is and why you think the author's work should be considered as "ethnic." As a class, we will read the poem together and discuss what it means. (This exercise is informal and is to encourage a deeper understanding of "ethnic" poetry and its contributions to ethnic literary studies as an art form.) (Poems can be found on the poets.org web site or from other resources.) (Length requirement. no more than two pages.)

Group Project and Presentation (20%): Throughout the semester I have designated four days for group presentations. Each presentation date is set up to introduce a novel or play and the author of the work. The presentation should take up to 20-30 minutes and is to focus on three areas:

- 1) Background information on the author.** This report should give your audience a clear sense of who the author is based on his or her history in relation to ethnicity, culture, education, etc.--enough so that the audience gets a clear idea of how the author's upbringing and ethnicity shaped his or her writing and contributions to the field of ethnic studies.
- 2) Explanation of the social and political context of the work within the historical framework that drives the plot.** The objective is to enlighten the audience about the history of the main characters' ethnic "group" (current and past) so they can make better sense of the motivations of the characters in connection to their ethnicity, gender, race, and class.
- 3) Foods and traditions.** Identify any cultural traditions or beliefs that play a significant role in our understanding of the characters' lives. (Consider foods, holidays, myths, parenting methods, etc.)

Required: Powerpoint visual presentation to go along with your oral presentation. Remember that your visual aid is just that -- an aid -- and shouldn't overpower your audience with flashy graphics and too much type. Simple and clear is best. Your grade will reflect how well you organize your report covering the three areas in clear and helpful ways.

OTHER POLICIES

Deadlines: There is no such thing as late work. If you have an emergency, please contact me before the due date to make other arrangements. Only in a documented emergency will I accept email submissions, which must be approved by me ahead of time. (All late work will be docked one full letter grade per day.)

Attendance: In order for the class to be successful it is important that you attend regularly. You will be allowed two unexcused absences. After that your grade will be lowered one full letter grade for each class you miss. **If you must miss class, please remember that you will still be held accountable for the material covered in class and all assignments that are due**

that day. (An excused absent includes, for example, illness and/or injury and requires written verification.)

Tardiness: *Please be in class on time.* Within the first five minutes of class I will take attendance. If you arrive after the five minutes, I will mark you late. Being late twice will equal one unexcused absence. Being late four times will equal two unexcused absences, etc. (Leaving early will count as an unexcused absence.)

Breaks: Unless it is an emergency, please refrain from leaving the class at all times. Doing so is disruptive and it will affect your class participation grade negatively.

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is essential to a useful education. Failure to act with academic integrity severely limits a person's ability to succeed in the classroom and beyond. Furthermore, academic dishonesty erodes the legitimacy of every degree awarded by the College. In this class and in the course of your academic career, present only your own best work; clearly document the sources of the material you use from others; and act at all times with honor.

Tutoring: Three Rivers has an excellent writing center with trained tutors who can assist students in developing better writing skills. Help is also available online via email at TRWritingCenter@trcc.comnet.edu. Include your name, student ID, and a brief explanation of the assignment. (Do not wait until the last minute.)

Students with disabilities: Any student with a hidden or visible disability which may require classroom modifications should see me about her/his disability within the first week or two of class. I will ask you to see one of the learning disabilities counselors on campus so that together we can work out an appropriate plan to meet your needs.

Cell phones--calls and text messaging (and Twittering?): School regulations require that all cell phones and beepers be turned off in learning environments. If it is imperative for you to be available by cell phone or a beeper, please speak to me before class to arrive at a suitable agreement. (No text messaging either during class.) (Consequences to be discussed . . .)

Class cancellations: If class is cancelled, a notice will be posted outside the door. I will also try to send out an email to everyone, so please make sure your email address is current and listed in the school directory. School cancellations due to bad weather will be posted on the TRCC homepage and also recorded on the school's main phone number: 860-886-0177.

FALL 2009

AUGUST

Week One

27 Introduction to course.

SEPTEMBER

Week Two

3 *Growing Up Ethnic in America*: Read Introduction ix-xvii; and PERFORMING - all of the short stories, 3-90. One question minimum due on each story (minimum 9 total). Please list the story the question is from. Poem group 1.

Week Three

10 *Growing Up Ethnic in America*: Read CROSSING - all of the short stories, 93-172. One question minimum due on each story. Poem group 2.

Week Four

17 *Growing Up Ethnic in America*: Read NEGOTIATING - all of the short stories, 175-284. One question minimum due on each story. Poem group 3.

Week Five

24 *Growing Up Ethnic in America*: Read BRIDGING - all of the short stories, 288-368. One question minimum due on each story. Poem group 4.

OCTOBER

Week Six

1 Peer review: bring 5 copies of your formal typed essay. Poem group 5.

Week Seven

8 ESSAY ONE DUE. First presentation on Linda Hogan and *Power*. Read 1-147 (from *Power*). Five questions due. Poem group 1.

Week Eight

15 Finish *Power*, 148-235. Five questions due. Poem group 2.

Week Nine

22 No class - (I'm out of town for a conference.)

Week Ten

29 Second presentation on Maxine Hong Kingston and *The Woman Warrior*. Read 3-109. Six questions due: 2 for each section (No Name Woman, White Tigers, and Shaman). Poem group 3.

NOVEMBER

Week Eleven

5 Finish *The Woman Warrior*. Four questions due: 2 for each section (At the Western Palace and A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe). Poem group 4.

Week Twelve

- 12 Third presentation on Lorraine Hansberry and *A Raisin in the Sun*. Read entire play and bring in 2 questions for each Scene in each Act. (Act III only has one scene.)

Week Thirteen

- 19 Continue discussion on *A Raisin in the Sun* and watch the production of it. Poem group 5.

No class - Thanksgiving Week (November 26)

DECEMBER

Week Fourteen

- 3 Forth presentation on Junot Díaz and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* - Read the entire novel and bring in 5 questions from Part I, 5 from Part II, and 2 from Part III. (Total 12 questions)

Week Fifteen

- 9 PEER REVIEW: Bring in five copies of typed formal essay. Everyone bring a poem.
- 17 FINAL ESSAY DUE.

*Final grades will be posted on the web. If you would like your essay back right away, please enclose a SASE with it. Otherwise, please pick up your essay next semester.

ⁱ Some of the course content description was taken from Brenda Boudreau's Ethnic Literature online course outline, 2003.