

Women Writers Across Cultures

English 261 - Spring Semester 2010

Associate Professor Janet Hagen

Office Hours: TR 2:30-3:30 and by appointment

*I will also be available Saturday mornings for email consultations. Please email your questions or concerns by Friday evening and I will reply Saturday morning.

Location: C216

Phone: 892-5738

E-mail: jhagen@trcc.commnet.edu

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"

. . . identification names not only the history of the subject but the subject of history.

Diane Fuss -- *Identification Papers*

This course is an exploration of women writers from a cross-cultural perspective. Our approach will be to examine literature through various critical approaches, mainly formalist, feminist, and postcolonial. Topics for exploration will be women's (gender) roles in family, social life, relationships, economics, religion, and politics; women's relation to their country; women's relationships with other women (for example, "sisterhood" and female sexuality and desire); sexual and gender identity; the female body (construction and representation of); migration and exile; mother/daughter relationships; motherhood; violence against women; women's relationships with the written word; and women's participation in activism and resistance.

Course Objectives

- Identify and appreciate the contributions of women writers from a global perspective.
- Develop an understanding of and a respect for other cultural perspectives.
- Recognize the value of using different critical approaches to interpret literature and then be able to use these various approaches in literary analyses.
- Enhance critical thinking skills through reading, writing, and class discussions.
- Develop an interpretation about both the meaning and structure in a work of literature and support this perspective with specifics from the text in the written form of a formal essay.

Required Texts

- Keller, Keller Okja. *Comfort Women*
- Garcia, Cristina. *Dreaming in Cuban*
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Purple Hibiscus*
- Mootoo, Shani. *Cereus Blooms at Night*
- al-Shaykh, Hana. *Women of Sand and Myrrh*
- Handouts (see syllabus)

Grade Percentages

- Thought-provoking questions 15%
- Informative presentation 15%
- Essay one 15%
- Essay two 20%
- Final essay 25%
- Class participation 10%

EXPLANATION OF ASSIGNMENT AND GRADES

Thought-Provoking Questions (15%): 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. (See syllabus for required amount.) (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.)

What I am looking for: 1) questions that demonstrate you have read the required pages and 2) a connection to the text, evident by page numbers and direct citations (when applicable). If you ask a simple question that can be answered with a simple or overall general answer, such as “what is the main theme?”, you will receive a low grade. The more thought provoking the questions are, the higher the grade. I will begin collecting questions week two (next week).

**You will not be allowed to turn questions in once class starts nor will you be able to turn questions in late (after class) or through email.*

Informative Presentation (15%): 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 her work. (This presentation is not to be a literary analysis of the novel.)

Requirements: Typed report (5-7 pages in length)
 PowerPoint visual (should support the presentation, not take over it)
 Clear verbal presentation (use notes and practice beforehand)

10-20 minutes in length

****A breakdown of required components:** setting (time and place[s]), history of country and regions, role of religion or spirituality (that affects the characters' lives), politics (when applicable), cultural markers and traditions (food, holidays, etc.), class (economic divisions), and anything else that you think is important to know (to understand the novel and the characters).

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 (60%): 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 the essay. Send to TRWritingCenter@trcc.commnet.edu*

Class Participation (10%): This final ten 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. Periodically, I will assign in- or out-of-class writing assignments or group activities. Your participation in these activities will be figured into this grade percentage. (In-class activities cannot be made up!)

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. (Leaving early will count as an absence. Leaving the class to take a break before the official break will affect your class participation grade.)

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!) (Just so there is no confusion, homework assignments and questions will not be accepted at all without a written formal excuse; only essays will be accepted late for a pass or fail grade.)

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**

Cell phones and iPods/iTouch: 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.

Plagiarism: See handout.

Students with disabilities: Any student with a hidden or visible disability that 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 the learning disability counselor, Chris Scarborough, so we can work out an appropriate plan to meet your needs.

Bad weather and class cancellations: On stormy days, call the school or listen to the news to see if school is cancelled. If I have to cancel class due to inclement weather or other reasons, I will attempt to email you before class. (Please make sure your email address is current in commnet.) (If class is canceled, follow the syllabus to keep up on the readings and work.)

COURSE OUTLINE – FALL 2010

August

- 26 Introduction to course. Why do we read women's stories? What is the history of women writers in the field of literary studies? Why do we read women writers from a cross-cultural perspective?

September

- 2 Handouts – packet 1
- 9 Handouts – packet 2
- 16 Presentation One. *Comfort Women*, 1-113
- 23 *Comfort Women*, 115-213
- 30 **Essay One Due.** Video *Fire*

October

- 7 Presentation Two. *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, Suha -3-80, Tamr 83-157
- 14 *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, Suzanne 161-236, Nur 239-274, Epilogue 273-280
- 21 **Essay Two Due.** Video
- 28 Presentation Three. *Dreaming in Cuban*, "Ordinary Seductions" 3-101

November

- 4 *Dreaming in Cuban*, "Imagining Winter and the Languages Lost" 105-245
- 11 *Veterans Day - No class (read ahead)*
- 18 Presentation Four. *Cereus Blooms at Night*, 1-249
- 25 *Thanksgiving vacation - enjoy!*

December

- 2 Presentation Five. *Purple Hibiscus*, 3-161
- 9 *Purple Hibiscus*, 162-307
- 16 Last day of class. **Final Essay Due. No exceptions!!**

Reading Guide: Questions for Thought

1. How does women's writing validate their life experiences?
2. In what ways is the nature of women's writing conditioned by and reflective of uniquely female experiences?
3. Women throughout the world have used the literary form as a means of expression. What are they expressing?
4. Is there such a thing as "universal appeal?"
5. Are there commonalities connected to gender which make women's experiences recognizable regardless of their cultural location?
6. How does one escape/challenge the ethnocentric implications of assuming the west as a standard for literary conventions and authority?
7. 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)?
8. How do these stories reflect women's strengths and their attempts to overcome their (culturally imposed) impotence and take control of their lives?

Student Contract

Please read and sign acknowledging that you understand what academic integrity is and what the consequences are for violating it.

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.

General Definition (Student Discipline Policy, section 2:10, Board of Trustees of Connecticut Community Colleges)

Academic Dishonesty shall in general mean conduct which has as its intent or effect the false representation of a student's academic performance, including but not limited to

- (a) cheating on an examination,
- (b) collaborating with others in work to be presented, contrary to the stated rules of the course,
- (c) plagiarizing, including the submission of others' ideas or papers (whether purchased, borrowed, or otherwise obtained) as one's own,
- (d) stealing or having unauthorized access to examination or course materials,
- (e) falsifying records of laboratory or other data,
- (f) submitting, if contrary to the rules of a course, work previously presented in another course, and
- (g) knowingly and intentionally assisting another student in any of the above, including assistance in an arrangement whereby any work, classroom performance, examination or other activity is submitted or performed by a person other than the student under whose name the work is submitted or performed.

By reading and signing this contract, I am acknowledging that I understand what the general definitions are that constitute Academic Integrity and that if I partake in any of these activities I will fail this class and could be expelled from college.

NAME _____ DATE _____