

English 209 - Summer 2006
Intro to Fiction: Literature and Oppression
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Course Overview: Calling something “an Introduction to Fiction course” is pretty broad. Ostensibly, there should be some coverage of generic features of fiction, some discussion of different approaches to those conventions, and probably some discussion of things like characters and language. We’ll be doing all of that this summer. More specifically, we’ll be doing that by looking at these topics in texts written by and about oppressed peoples. Therefore, we will also be looking at issues such as rhetorical goals (what does the text hope to accomplish?) and historical representation (what kind of situation are readers being exposed to by the text?). Over the course of the semester, we will think about all of these topics and reflect on them through substantial in-class writing, a comparative paper, a research assignment, and a final project. Although this is a fiction course, the focus is also on writing, so expect quite a bit of that. With this in mind, we will also continue to look at issues in composition, particularly the formation of a thesis and the process of supporting claims with evidence.

Course Policies:

Reading: This is a summer course, which means that we have less time to do a similar amount of work. The reading load will be a bit intense at times but I will expect you to keep up. My suggestion to you is to get ahead whenever possible. We will have occasional reading days during class time but do not count on these to catch up - trust a guy who’s been taking a lot of lit courses for a long long time.

Attendance: Come to class. A lot of our work will hinge on discussion and in-class activity. I do not have a formal attendance policy per se, but 15% of your grade will be based on short reading quizzes that I will give in the first several minutes of class. The early timing of these quizzes should also encourage you to avoid being late to class. If you have a legitimate excuse for missing class, don’t worry – there will be a quiz nearly every day and I will drop a couple points at the end of the semester to smooth out one or two missed or botched quizzes. Also, if you miss 4 or more classes do not bother us with any sort of return as it will result in your failure of the class. University-sponsored events, documented medical issues, and religious holidays are, of course, excused.

Peer Reviews: For each major paper, we will be peer reviewing your drafts. This means that you will bring in two copies of your rough draft and get into groups to critique each other’s work. The idea behind this activity is that it is often difficult to see the flaws or weaknesses in your own writing, especially while you are working on it. Having an outside reader look over your draft and ideas can help to spot problems and can provide ideas you may not have already thought of. It also helps you develop a critical eye when you look at others’ work and have to articulate what is working and what is not. We will talk a great deal about peer reviews before the first draft is due, so you should be fairly well prepared. Besides peer reviews, I also highly encourage you to stop at one of the Writer’s Roost locations to have yet another outside reader look over your paper. They are especially good at pointing out sentence-level problems that you may not notice.

Conferences and Office Visits: We will be holding Conferences on two occasions during the semester - one for each major paper. This will be a time for you to interact with me in a one-on-one setting in an effort to improve your writing and clarify any specific questions you may have. We will schedule a time outside of class to meet in my office for these sessions - they are generally very informal and well-liked by all. Just to be clear though, conferences are mandatory and failure to attend will affect your grade. Other office visits for any reason (troubles with specific texts, assignments, or just to tell me how much you enjoy the course) are wildly encouraged. I will meet for just about any reason. I am almost always on campus, so if you cannot make my office hours, let me know.

Late Work: I do not accept make-up work. I also will not accept papers after the due date, nor will I grade a paper that does not have peer review sheets attached. As the University policy demands, failure to complete any paper will result in a failure of the course. That said, I’m a pretty friendly negotiator, who makes exceptions when necessary. Let’s just talk in advance.

Plagiarism: Do not plagiarize ever! I am a bit harder on plagiarism than the University. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please ask. Again - when in doubt, please ask. It's not your fault if you don't know but it is your fault if you don't ask. When we get to research-based assignments, we'll talk a bit about citation and the rest, but that's not usually what people are talking about when they talk about plagiarism, right?

The English Department says this about plagiarism:

"Stealing and passing off as your own someone else's ideas or words, or using information from another's work without crediting the source, is called "plagiarism." Some specific examples of actions that constitute plagiarism include pasting together uncredited information or ideas from the Internet or published sources, submitting an entire paper written by someone else, submitting a paper written for another class (and thus not original work), and copying another student's work (even with the student's permission). In order to avoid unintentional plagiarism and to represent your work honestly, you will need to be meticulous about giving credit to any and all sources, whether directly quoted (even a few words) or paraphrased. Because one of the goals of this course is to help you improve your writing, plagiarism hurts you as much as it does anyone. If you plagiarize another's work, you will not be receiving the needed feedback to improve your own writing. There will be a zero tolerance policy for any type of plagiarism in this class. All incidents of plagiarism will be penalized, reported, and kept on file in the English Department, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the University Provost's Office."

Disability Statement: The KU office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) coordinates accommodations and services for all students who are eligible. If you have a disability for which you wish to request accommodations and have not contacted SSD, please do so as soon as possible. Their office is located in 22 Strong Hall; their phone number is 785-864-2620 (V/TTY). Information about their services can be found at <http://www.ku.edu/~ssdis>. Please also contact me privately in regard to your needs in this course. I'm interested in helping students learn, so let's talk how that works best for you.

Required Materials:

Morrison - *The Bluest Eye*
Argueta - *One Day of Life*
El Saadawi - *Woman at Point Zero*
Soto - *Buried Onions*
Coetzee - *Waiting for the Barbarians*

Lunsford, *The Everyday Writer*
Composition and Literature 2003-2004 (Department of English pamphlet)

Grading:

Reading Quizzes	15%
In-Class writing	15%
Comparative Paper	20%
Research Paper	25%
Final Project/Polemic	25%

Assignments:

Reading Quizzes: As I mentioned above, these quizzes will be given in the first few minutes of class and are aimed at encouraging reading for detail. Generally, they will be one or two questions and will be rather easy for anyone who read at less than a breakneck pace. I do not give retakes of quizzes if you are absent or late but don't worry - I drop a few at the end of the semester to allow for a missed class or the occasional mental failure.

In-Class Writing: There will be three major in-class writing assignments. These will be designed to point you toward certain areas of discussion and will (hopefully) work as building blocks for your papers.

Comparative Paper: In your first formal paper you will be working with Morrison and Argueta's novels. Basically, you will be discussing how an issue or theme (we will brainstorm several of these in class) is addressed in each text. However, this will NOT be a simple compare/contrast essay; you will be making a claim about each text and explaining how and why these differences are significant. More on this paper as time moves on . . .

Research Paper: This is a more open assignment. You will pick any text we have worked with in the course and tell your reader something about the text, using outside research. This research can be literary criticism of the text, historical information, psychological/medical information, business or economic insights, etc. We will talk a great deal more about this project (especially the selection of research sources) before starting.

Polemic: Your final project will take us outside of the academic genres of the "essay" of the "paper" and ask you to write something that folks outside of the University might actually read, connecting one or more of our readings to a social conversation as it might appear in a culture piece for *The Atlantic* or an op-ed in the *New York Times*. The goal will be to use the text as an illustration of some broader point you want to convey. So, you could find yourself writing about Argueta as a way to talk about American military involvement in South American countries, or El Saadawi in a piece suggesting that feminisms focus their efforts in a particular way, or Soto in a discussion of Spanish-English mixing in literature. But whatever the content you choose, the emphasis will be on using the literature to engage in a broader social conversation. I'll note that it's perfectly fine (and might help you out) if you bridge this project from your research paper, but that's up to you. Much more on this later . . .