ENGLISH 2335.660---61:
Themes and Genres of the Americas
Fall 2014
MW 2:00---3:15 p.m.
BH 206

Instructor: Dr. Wendy Walker
Office: Faculty Office Center 126
Office Hours: MW 11:30---1:30; T 8:00---9:00; MW 10:00---12:00; T 11---12; other times available by appointment
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*The best way to reach me is via email. While I try to respond to all email within 24 hours, I am not available outside of regular business hours and likely won't respond after 5 p.m. or on weekends.

Course Description:

Gregory Currie, a professor of philosophy at the University of Nottingham, recently argued in the New York Times that we ought not to claim that literature improves us as people, because there is no “compelling evidence that suggests that people are morally or socially better for reading Tolstoy” or other great books. However, such evidence does exist. Raymond Mar, a psychologist at York University in Canada and Keith Oatley, a professor emeritus of cognitive psychology at the University of Toronto, reported that individuals who often read fiction appear to be better able to understand other people, empathize with them and view the world from their perspective. We will explore our own response to this debate through reading and writing about fiction, poetry, drama, and nonfiction. The textbook introduces and explains literature with reading selections centered on five enduring themes—Growing Up and Growing Older, Women and Men, Money and Work, Peace and War, and Varieties of Protest.
The course is meant to introduce you to the genres of fiction, drama, poetry, and nonfiction prose. The focus of this course is on approaches to reading and interpreting literature, emphasizing skills, techniques, and the languages of interpretation. We will center this project on a handful of socially relevant themes that highlight the diversity of human experience, drawing from a rich pool of traditional and contemporary literary pieces, including a broad collection of short stories, creative non-fiction, essays, autobiographies, and novels written by a group of authors who represent different social classes, races, genders, cultures, and sexual orientations. We will explore the language, form, social, and historical forces that shape these literary selections in order to understand the various forms of literature and to learn how to write about them.

In addition, the course work is designed to allow you to explore what you know about literature's connections to writing and culture as well as what you know about yourself as a member of society. Therefore, I am especially interested in helping you explore the intersection of the personal and public, the private and the social in your thinking, your reading, your writing, and your life. This class will ask you to explore what you know about culture (academic and otherwise) and yourself. We will look at writing, our own and that of others, as articulations of knowledge. We will, therefore, need to continually ask ourselves a number of important questions, such as:

- Who is the author of this piece?
- Why was this piece written? What “knowledge” does it attempt to impart?
- What do we know about the historical, social, and cultural background of this piece?
- How do I connect to this piece? (How do I relate to it through my own life and experience?)

Of course, our work should not be limited to these questions, and many more will arise throughout our discussions. However, it is important to remember that the work we do should involve deep analysis.

**Required Texts***:


*Several additional texts will be made available via Content in Blackboard (Bb). Students are required to print these texts and bring them to class on the day assigned. If texts are not in hand, student will receive no participation points for that day.

**Course Objectives:**

1. To consider how ideas, values, beliefs, and other aspects of culture express and affect human experience by examining the connections between literary works and their social, historical, and cultural contexts.
2. To use literature to explore ideas that foster aesthetic and intellectual creation in order to understand the human condition across cultures and nationalities.
3. To recognize the distinctive characteristics of relevant literary periods, genres, and writers.
4. To understand and use basic literary terms and concepts.
5. To develop analytic skills by close reading, class discussion, and writing.
6. To use writing as a tool for learning.

**Student Learning Objectives:**
Students who successfully complete this course will be able to demonstrate knowledge and skills in four Core Objectives defined by the Higher Education Coordinating Board of the State of Texas:

**Critical Thinking**
CT1. Generate and communicate ideas by combining, changing, or reapplying existing information.
CT3. Analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information.

**Communication Skills**
CS1. Develop, interpret, and express ideas through written communication.

**Personal Responsibility:**
PR1. Evaluate choices and actions, and relate consequences to decision making.

**Social Responsibility:**
SR3. Engage in regional, national, and global communities.

**Course Requirements and Policies:**
Grading: In order to pass this class you must do all of the work, including all reading that is assigned, in-class discussions, informal writing, and collaborative analysis and interpretation. Therefore, if you are absent during any class period, contact the instructor and/or a classmate immediately. Please also note the absence and tardy policy explained in this syllabus.

Informal Writing: This includes in-class essays, guided writing, freewriting, response journal writing, explications, comparisons/contrasts, reviews or any combination of these. As these are informal assignments, they need not be typed, but should be a minimum of one full page in length.

Formal Writing (Quizzes, Essay, and Exams):
Quizzes will be given randomly throughout the semester, and will include questions based on previous discussions as well as questions based on the assignment due on the day the quiz is given. You must be in class to take the quiz; no make-up quizzes will be given.

You will also be asked to write a literary analysis that discusses the texts we will read this semester. This is a formal essay assignment that will require close reading and synthesis of sources. You will be given a grading rubric well in advance of the due date; due date yet to be determined.

There will also be midterm and final exams. These are a combination of multiple choice questions and short and long essays based on our in-class discussions. These will be given
in class on the days assigned and you will have the full class period to complete these exams.

**NO LATE ESSAYS OR EXAMS WILL BE ACCEPTED.** You must turn in your exam in the class period in which it is due or receive a failing grade on the assignment.

Grading Scale:
- Participation, quizzes, informal writings, group work, etc.: 30%
- Literary Analysis: 10%
- Midterm Exam: 25%
- Final Exam: 35%

A = 90---100%  B= 80---89%  C= 70---79%  D=60---69%  F=59% or below

Academic Integrity/Plagiarism: University students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic misconduct for which a student is subject to penalty includes all forms of cheating, such as illicit possession of examinations or examination materials, falsification, forgery, complicity or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another as one’s own work.) In this class, academic misconduct or complicity in an act of academic misconduct on an assignment or test will result a failing grade for the course and students risk being placed on academic probation, suspension, or expulsion. If you are unsure about whether or not you might be plagiarizing, please talk to me.

Attendance: Because the formal work you do in the course depends on your in-class writing, informal writing, collaboration with your classmates, and discussions, if you miss more than four hours of class time your grade will be lowered by 1/3 for each hour of absence beyond the four hours. That is, a B will drop to a B- and so on. If you are absent, you are responsible for what you missed. Excessive tardiness will also lower your grade. If you participate in a sport or some other university sanctioned event or activity that requires you to miss class do not take this course during your travel season. Additionally, please note that NO ABSENCES ARE EXCUSED.

Dropping a Class: I hope that you never find it necessary to drop this or any other class. However, events can sometimes occur that make dropping a course necessary or wise. Please consult with me before you decide to drop to be sure it is the best thing to do. Should dropping the course be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop the course by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation WILL NOT automatically result in your being dropped from the class. **November 7** is the last day to drop a class with an automatic grade of “W” this term.

University Community Discourses, Diversity and Personal Responsibilities: Texas A&M University---Corpus Christi has a diverse student population that represents the population of the state. Our goal is to provide you with a high quality educational experience that is
free from repression. You are responsible for following the rules of the University, city, state and federal government. We expect that you will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation or disability. In class discussions, readings, and writing throughout this quarter, we will examine ideas from diverse perspectives. At this university, students and faculty are afforded an academic environment that allows for intellectual expression; challenging issues and ideas may arise, but none of these should be expressed in an inappropriate manner either verbally or in writing. One of the goals of a university is to challenge us to think again about what we know (and all that we don't know). This demands that we all share responsibility for creating and maintaining a democratic and civil learning environment in our classrooms and in the larger university community: we will be conscious of and accept responsibility for what we say and do, how we act, how our words and actions have consequences, and how our words and actions affect others. Racism, sexism, and other non-democratic or oppressive behaviors are unacceptable. Behaviors that infringe on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

Special Notices:
Grade Appeals: Students who feel that they have not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in this class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, cla.tamucc.edu/students/studentinfo.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean.

Disabilities Accommodations: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall 116.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

**Academic Advising: It is imperative that all students visit regularly with an academic adviser. Each college within the university has an academic advising center, staffed by full-time, professional advisers to assist students with course selection, degree plans, and other academic matters. To find out how to contact the right adviser, go to: http://www.tamucc.edu/academics/advising.php

Students who have yet to declare a major are advised by the Academic Advising Transition Center. For more information, go to: http://www.tamucc.edu/~aac
Statement of Academic Continuity

In the event of an unforeseen adverse event, such as a major hurricane and classes could not be held on the campus of Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi; this course would continue through the use of Blackboard and/or email. In addition, the syllabus and class activities may be modified to allow continuation of the course. Ideally, University facilities (i.e., emails, web sites, and Blackboard) will be operational within two days of the closing of the physical campus. However, students need to make certain that the course instructor has a primary and a secondary means of contacting each student.

Tentative Schedule:

August 27: Introduction to course; Paulette Childress White, “Alice”

September 8: Toni Morrison, from The Bluest Eye
September 10: Sandra Cisneros, “The Family of Little Feet” (L&S) and “The Monkey Garden” (Bb)
September 15: 30 Days (Bb); Sherman Alexi, “Jesus Christ’s Half Brother Is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation”
September 17: Alexi, cont’d.
September 22: How Nonfiction Works, L&S pgs. 1527---1533; Maxine Hong Kingston, “No Name Woman”
September 24: Audre Lorde, from Zami: A New Spelling of My Name
September 29: Tony Aviccoli Mecca, “Memoirs of a Sissy”
October 1: Introduction to Money and Work; Toni Cade Bambara, “The Lesson”
October 6: Dorothy Allison, “A Question of Class”
October 8: Barbara Ehrenreich, “On (Not) Getting By in America” (Bb)
October 13: B. Traven, “Assembly Line”
October 20: Midterm Exam (Part I)
October 22: Midterm Exam (Part II)
October 27: Introduction to Women and Men; Virginia Woolf, “Shakespeare’s Sister”
October 29: Gloria Anzaldua, “Speaking in Tongues” (Bb)
November 3: Cristina Garcia, “Inés in the Kitchen”
November 5: Tupac Shakur, “Keep Ya Head Up”
November 10: How Drama Works; Cherrie Moraga, Watsonville: Some Place Not Here
November 12: Moraga, cont’d.
November 17: Moraga, cont’d
November 19: Introduction to Peace and War; Tim O’Brien, “The Man I Killed”
November 24: Louise Erdrich, “The Red Convertible”
December 1: Introduction to Varieties of Protest; Pamela Hale, “Poem for an Iraqi Child in a Forgotten News Clip”; Katha Pollitt, “Trying to Write a Poem Against the War”