

English 2312, January Term 2019  
Introduction to Fiction: Ethnic Literary Imaginations

Dates: Jan. 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>: 9am-12pm/1pm-4pm  
Jan. 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>: 9am-12pm/1pm-4pm

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Office Hours: TBA

This course is an introduction to fiction with an emphasis on U.S. ethnic writings. The primary goals of the class are that students learn to recognize a range of narrative elements and to see how they function in key U.S. fictions. Each text we will read represents a specific set of historical and social relationships and they imagine particular U.S. identities. Yet how does a text construct a cultural identity, comment on a determinate historical moment, and organize human consciousness around social history? How does literature articulate political, social, and cultural dilemmas? And how does it structure our understandings of social interaction? As these questions imply, this course will explore how fiction creates and then navigates a gap between art and history in order to remark on U.S. social relationships. We will investigate how literary mechanisms situate a narrative within a determinate social context and how the narrative apparatuses of the selected works organize our perceptions of the complex worlds that they imagine. As such, we will conclude the class having learned how fiction works ideologically, understanding how the form, structure, and narrative elements of the selected texts negotiate history, politics, human psychology, and even the limitations of literary representation.

**PRE-COURSE READING:** Students are responsible for having read two novels *prior* to the first day of class.

Pre-course reading:

John Okada: *No-No Boy*

Junot Diaz: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

**Breadth (Language and Literature)**—Students will demonstrate an understanding of how a symbolic system communicates meaningfully within its language community.

Texts:

James Baldwin: “Sonny’s Blues” (to be provided)

Jaime Rodriguez: *Love and Rockets* (selections, to be provided)

Maxine Hong Kingston: *The Woman Warrior*

John Okada: *No-No Boy*

Junot Diaz: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

Oscar Casares: *Domingo* (short story); *Chango* (short story)

Toshi Mori: *Japanese Hamlet* (short story)

Luis Valdez: *Vietnam Campesino*; *Zoot Suit* (Dramas)

**Course Requirements:**

Attendance: Given the highly-compressed calendar of J Term, you are not allowed to miss an entire day of class without penalty.

**Participation:** This will make up 15% of your final grade. Participation includes coming to class with a couple of questions/comments based on the assigned readings. Active participation is necessary in order for our class to function. Note: I will select a few students at random to share their questions and comments at the beginning of each meeting.

**Quizzes:** 15% of your overall grade. These short exams will be delivered on days on which the class begins a new text, excluding day 1.

**Short Papers:** Students are responsible for submitting *five* 1-2-page response papers which address a critical question presented at the end of each text. 10 pages total. 20% of your overall grade.

**Final Paper:** For this paper, you will be asked to form an argument regarding two of our primary texts. The paper will address how two selected texts mobilize particular narrative elements in order to articulate social problems and to comment on dilemmas of literary representation. This essay will value 30% of your final grade. No research is required for this assignment. Instead, students should concentrate on close-readings with a critical focus on the themes and aesthetic features of their chosen texts. You may reference your short papers as guidance for this final writing assignment. 8 pages.

**Final Exam:** You will be given several excerpts, one from each of the texts we will have read. You will identify the excerpts and demonstrate a close reading. Your responses should include an analysis of an excerpt's formal elements and it should engage the topics we will have discussed throughout the semester. Final exam 20% of your grade.

**Office Hours:** As always, my office hours are at your disposal. Please use them as a resource so that I may further help you individually with the course assignments. If you cannot make my specified office hours, I will be happy to make an appointment with you.

**Disability Accommodations:** Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.

**Religious Observance:** Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

**Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities:** Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)

**Campus Carry:** “In accordance with Texas Senate Bill 11, also known as the ‘campus carry’ law, following consultation with entire University community SMU determined to remain a weapons-free campus. Specifically, SMU prohibits possession of weapons (either openly or in a concealed manner) on campus. For more information, please see: [http://www.smu.edu/BusinessFinance/Police/Weapons\\_Policy](http://www.smu.edu/BusinessFinance/Police/Weapons_Policy).”

### **Session 1: Realism and the Relationships Between History and Fiction (Part I)**

Guiding Questions: What is “realism”? What are our expectations of “representative fiction”? How can fiction access history? How do literary elements condition the possibility that certain stories may be told and particular histories imagined? How does fiction foster a collective sense of identity and generate community value systems for a determinate social group? What are the aesthetic qualities of realism. Is realism real?

1/7: Intro to Class; John Okada- *No-No Boy*

### **Session 2 and 3: Form and Genre; Modernism; and Representing Lived and Unlived Experiences**

Guiding Questions: What is the difference between a story and narrative? What is a narrator? What is a “narrative element”? What is a protagonist? What is a hero? What is a novel? What is autobiography? What is memoir? How does a narrative construct the bounds of historical reflection and human consciousness? What is the relationship between art and memory, ideology, and identity? What are the aesthetic features of ethnic modernism? What political and ideological values do these features communicate?

1/8-1/9: Maxine Hong Kingston-*The Woman Warrior*

### **Session 4: Postmodern Narrative; The Relations and Politics of Representation; The Novel as a “System”**

What is a “major character”? A “minor character”? A “non-fictional character”? What is a “narrative system”? How do the relationships between characters understood as units of representation within a narrative structure correspond to extra literary relationships of political power? What is “character-space”? What happens when narrative systems mimic or invert political ones? What are the aesthetic features of ethnic “post-modernism”?

1/10: Junot Díaz-*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

### **Session 5: Ethnic Short Stories**

What is the relationship between “discourse time,” “story time,” and “homogenous time” in the short stories? How does “time” function differently in short fiction and in a novel? How does literary form privilege certain perspectives while marginalizing others? How might pluralizing narrative perspective complicate the meaning of political territories and challenge the value normally assigned to ideological symbols (such as flags, religious signs, and even a person’s name?)

1/11 (morning): Oscar Casares: *Domingo; Chango* (short stories).

1/11 (afternoon): Writing Workshop

**Session 6: Short Stories (cont.) and Graphic Fiction**

1/14 (morning) Jaime Rodriguez: *Love and Rockets* (selections, to be provided)

1/14 (afternoon) Toshio Mori: *Japanese Hamlet*; James Baldwin: *Sonny's Blues*

**Session 7: Ethnic Drama**

How does drama both open and limit possibilities of articulating “political space”? How does the embodiment of character enable or restrict imagining a social actor’s relationship to social history, as well as to an “imaginary community.” How does drama recruit audience members as “active” agents of the social worlds it imagines?

1/15 Luis Valdez: *Vietnam Campesino*; *Zoot Suit*

**Session 8: Review/Exam**

Review key terms, concepts, and theories. Final exam

1/16 (morning): Literary Review.

1/16 (afternoon): Final Exam

