

**English 236: The Experience of Fiction:
Difference/Diversity
Explorations into Creating
Sustainable Inclusive Learning Communities**

**The arc of the moral universe is long, but it
bends toward justice.**

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

**JoAnne Isbey
Winter/2002-2003**

English 236 - W1
Winter, Term II, 2002-2003
Wednesday evenings
6:40 p.m. - 9:10 p.m.
Briggs 10 - McNichols Campus

the experience of fiction:

diversity

and difference--

explorations into creating

sustainable

inclusive

learning lives and communities

“We are made for goodness. We are made for love. We are made for friendliness. We are made for togetherness. We are made for all of the beautiful things that you and I know. We are made to tell the world that there are no outsiders. All, all are welcome: black, white, red, yellow, rich, poor, educated, not educated, male, female, gay, straight, all, all, all. We are meant all, all to belong to this family, this human family, God’s family.”

--Desmond M. Tutu

Foreword, Forgiveness and Reconciliation, 2001.

**Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting--
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.**

**--Mary Oliver
“Wild Geese”**

Winter Term II, 2002-2003's articulation of English 236: Fiction/Diversity will bridge our classroom theoretical study with our applied lived community experience in

*a multicultural

*intergenerational struggle

*to explore,

*to redefine,

*to rebuild,

*and to respirit our learning communities

from the grassroots.

“Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.”

--Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Forget the former things: do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing.”

--Isaiah, 43: 16-19

“The world is not what I think: it is what I live through.”

--Merleau-Ponty

The goal of our winter section of English 236 will be our struggle to “create a beloved community” by loosening the chains that bind us to “the former things” and inhibit us from “doing a new thing;” thereby, preventing “a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.” Through a careful process of integrating self-reflection and community reflection, faithfully recorded in our working journal, we may make new worlds of “what we live through.” As we strive to listen to the “harsh and exciting” offerings that the world presents to our imaginations, we may find a deeper “place in the family of things.”

“I don’t believe anyone knows more than I do about running the country. Everyone is capable of going beyond where we are. We can do what has never been done before....We are somebodies only in relationship to other bodies.”

“We have to love America enough to change it.”

**--James Boggs
Co-founder, Detroit Summer**

Our winter semester’s work will link our UDM students and teacher with The Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership [BCNCL] in our service learning elective option of working with a Detroit project, The Power of Ideas. Our classroom community experiences will also connect us to our UDM Leadership Development Institute and our UDM Institute to Build Sustainable Community. By dissolving the borders that separate our university study from our “other” experiences that “we live through,” we will create liminal space where integrations of head, heart, and hand may happen, bridging our theory and our praxis.

We will focus our work on the imaginative study of fiction through the lenses of difference, diversity, and inclusivity to seed and open up ongoing increments of insight that may change forever the way that we walk in the world. That challenge is contained in the visions of UDM sponsoring congregations, The Religions Sisters of Mercy and The Society of Jesus. In the chaotic context of our contemporary human condition, our UDM grounding foundation and contemporary mission calls us to awareness and responsibility that privilege the needs of poor women and children and that call us to struggle for social justice--“harsh and exciting” invitations “into the family of things.”

“Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it.”

**--Frantz Fanon
The Wretched of the Earth**

“No one is in charge of the future. We are all in charge

--Sarah van Gelder

Yes!

Because we are both individual and social beings, we will honor the uniqueness of each member of our working group and the collective desires of our larger learning community. It is, therefore, crucial that we **listen** attentively to each other and that we **reflect** deeply on ideas and experiences that may initially strike us as opposite to those that make up our own present individual way of thinking and being in the world. The overlap between ourselves and the “other,” the different, opens up intersections of rich possibility for transformation: liminal spaces where we can find entrance into community, “the family of things,” that has the capacity to build new places in our spirits and our intellects. [See Toni Morrison’s handout on language that is excerpted from her Nobel Lecture.]

“The links between language and discourse, on the one hand, and discrimination and racism, on the other hand, are complex and varied. They are part of an intricate network of social relationships in which power plays a central role. The dominant white group has many ways to exert, consolidate, and legitimate that power and thus to maintain control. In many cases the enactment of power is direct and immediately physical, as with military or police action or imprisonment. In other instances, with social policies that adversely affect minority life. For the dominant group’s power to work effectively, it must be legitimated. It requires decision making and legislation by society’s political elites. It presupposes public discussions and consensus among the dominant groups in society. And it requires mediation in socialization networks, such as schools, and in information-disseminating institutions, such as the mass media. Thus for one group to exert power over another, it must reproduce the conditions that allow it to maintain control.”

--Geneva Smitherman-Donaldson

Discourse and Discrimination

Too often, institutional and discursive pressures incline us toward generalizations that elide the differences that shape our responses to the world around us. We will attend to our process closely and continually critique the nature of the places from which we speak. Sustaining that kind of critical consciousness is very hard work; a refusal of universal

prescriptions. Place, that conjunction of histories and identities that ultimately inscribes us all, constantly shifts the ground upon which we stand, forcing us to alter the meanings we attach to it.

It is crucial, therefore, that everyone have the opportunity to speak, and to that end we will work hard to create a safe atmosphere where each of us will feel free to enter into the conversation. We will articulate the terms of our differences of race, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, and age that are both social constructions and yet defining aspects of our personal identities, the place from which our readings and interpretations of fiction begin. Such hard work promises a life transformed, where difference doesn't necessarily mean permanent separation from "the family of things." We will struggle together for an analysis of identities that is a weave of class, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and age that complicates our notions of power. To that end, we will explore the cultural focus on desire for middle-class assimilation that results in divestment of a strong sense of race/class/gender identity, creating a form of internalized oppression, e.g., middle-class norms that live in us as inner tyrants. Against that pressure, we will attempt to include the construct of cultural communalism, "the family of things."

We will also struggle together to identify, analyze, include, and understand the differences in perspectives that our prior and present experience generates as we read fiction as a practice and as a way of seeing, central to living.

"We will not solve the problems of the world from the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."

--Albert Einstein

"For while objectively a social reality, the work of art is a projection of a deeply personal process, and any approach that ignores the personal at the expense of the social is necessarily incomplete."

**--Ralph Ellison
Shadow and Act, 1964**

"In the beginning water covered the Earth and all creatures lived in the underworld below. People could talk, animals could talk, rocks could talk."

--Jicarilla Apache tradition

**The first function of a mythology
--myths and mythic rituals
sacred songs
and ceremonial dances--
is to waken in the individual
a sense of awe,
wonder, and participation
in the inscrutable mystery of being.**

**--Joseph Campbell
Myths, 1976**

"We are contemporaries only so far as our understanding reaches. If we want to be at home on this earth, even at the price of being at home in this century, we must try to take part in the interminable dialogue with its essence."

**--Hannah Arendt
"Understanding and Politics"
Parisian Review
vol. 20, no. 4 (July-August
1953), p.392**

"The essence of the human mentality is . . . the power of seeing one thing in another."

--Susan K. Langer

"We must learn our common symbols . . . and share them with the world."

--Ntozake Shange

"The short story is a piece of work. The novel is a way of life."

--Toni Cade Bambara

"In our response to fictional character, there is often a deep fascination with the opaque. Struggling with the dark and difficult can link, even fuse our feelings about human existence with our notions about literary art. Serious readers, quite as an article of faith, give themselves to complexities of person and personality, rich obscurities of the psyche, all-but-insuperable barriers to 'seeing' the other. This persuasion that whatever is difficult must be close to the truth draws upon a line of modern thought going back to Freud and

Nietzsche: but it also has an esthetic dimension. We take pleasure in the struggle to make out a complex or obscure character: this constitutes part of the esthetics of form: it may also remind us of our experience in daily life. Modern sensibility favors open endings, incompleteness. We want an art upon which we can exercise interpretive skills, and indulge delusions of being quasi-artists too. We want to joust with alternative readings, perhaps even to relish our limitations as readers."

**--Irving Howe
A Critic's Notebook, pp. 70-71, 1994.**

"Truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power; contrary to a myth whose history and function would reward further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned, the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true."

**--Michael Foucault
"Truth and Power"
Power Knowledge:
Selected Interviews and Other Writings--
1972-1977 p.131**

course goals

*To explore the construct of a sustainable learning community through an immersion experience in both theory and practice using both the campus and the external community as sites of learning. (Service learning component will be discussed.)

*To deepen and broaden our experience of fiction and to enhance our awareness and enjoyment of that experience. Our particular focus of our work together this semester is on our appreciation of the difference and diversity that inheres in our rich pluralistic heritage of fiction-- "the I and the not I." We will explore Abdullah's schema of inclusivity as a lens to surface commonality.

"A human being is part of the whole, called by us 'universe,' a part limited in time and space. He [and she] experiences himself [and herself], his [and her] thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest--a kind of delusion of his [and her] consciousness. This delusion is a prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this

prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole nature of its beauty."

--Albert Einstein

"Our greatest strength lies not in how much we differ from each other but in how much--how very much--we are the same."

--Eknath Easwaran

What is hateful to you, do not do to others.

--Rabbi Hillel

Do not hurt others with that which hurts yourself.

--Buddha

Do unto others whatever you would have them do unto you.

--Jesus

None of you is a believer until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself.

--Muhammad

***To expand individuals' capabilities by broadening their imaginations and experiences.**

***To provide community contexts to assist individuals in reflecting on the role of values, purposes, and places in order to develop a balance between their own individual development and the social needs of the communities in which they participate.**

To provide meaningful contexts for the development of process leadership skills necessary for intergenerational and multicultural conversations, important to all of us now as we build our future: dialogue/conversation followed by individual/group action. We will rotate group leaders. **Everyone is a leader.*

***To instill a sense of desire and responsibility in participants for building and sustaining learning communities as a lifelong pursuit.**

***To construct an individual and collective integrative paradigm of a sustainable learning community through our own experience of praxis/reflection.**

*To establish community partnership between our university course: English 236, our Leadership Development Institute, our Institute for Building Sustainable Community, and the Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership through our participation within the overarching desire to strengthen the fabric of contemporary human life.

course objectives

*to engage in building community with others across the barriers of age, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion.

*to enjoy the experience of fiction more deeply by developing skill, strength, and confidence in inquiring how it is understood, produced and assessed.

*to increase our ability to ask questions that will illuminate the particular text under discussion: to define ways of knowing as well as objects of knowledge.

*to realize the importance of stories as mirrors of human experience, reflecting human motives, conflicts, and values.

*to view each story as the verbal issue of a spiritual struggle, the response of a gifted writer to certain provocations of a particular time and place, or possibly of life itself.

*to identify with fictional characters in human situations as a means of relating to others: to gain greater insight into our own humanity through involvement with “the other” in fiction and in our learning groups and classroom community.

*to become more aware of significant writers representing diverse backgrounds and traditions in fiction.

*to interpret, analyze, and explain the works we study together and to share our responses orally and in writing.

*to broaden and deepen our own initial responses to fiction by incorporating the responses of others into our journal entries and reflections: **The response journal is your primary place for grounded inquiry.**

*to experience integrated learning and to develop more mature habits of reading and reflection that will inspire us to continue learning in our lives outside of school.

*to explore many approaches to the fiction that we are studying together this semester, so that we will develop a multifaceted way of responding to the multiplicity of meanings that inhere in a text and in our lives.

*to engage in “literary conversation” that bridges and connects our primary life experience with our secondary imaginative experience.

*to develop visible, active, and positive presence in our learning classroom communities and our broader communities outside the university.

*to identify and resist reductive labels of complex human behaviors.

*to become more deeply related to what we think, what we feel, and who we are.

*to help share and support the evolution of sustainable communities, inside of the university and outside in our broader communities.

*to rethink our current value systems, lifestyles, and basic priorities.

*to enhance our own individual and group leadership skills.

*to hold contradictions, differentiate and unify opposites, think in a dialectical and in a non-linear way, thereby weaving together apparently incompatible material into an holistic vision.

*to create contexts that make room for us to nurture and strengthen our learning.

*to explore inner practices that can help us bridge the gaps that disconnect us from each other, our work, and ourselves: reclaiming selfhood, confronting fear, and thinking the world together by means of paradox.

*to participate in interactive teaching/learning communities that cultivate the inner life of each member and grow community from that inner ground into external form and shape in our larger world.

required texts

Abdullah, Sharif. Creating a World That Works for All. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 1999. [Abdullah's work will be a primary frame through which we will study the constructs of inclusivity, difference, and diversity as they are mirrored in the texts and in our lives.]

Albrecht, Gloria. "The Ethical Significance of Difference." Response to work in a liberal arts faculty seminar that studied Iris Young's book, Justice and the Politics of Difference. Albrecht connects ethical concerns with the very nature of our learning institutions and offers us ways to regard questions of ethics and justice. [handout]

Alexie, Sherman. The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven. New York: Harper Perennial, 1993.

Anaya, Rudolfo A. Bless Me, Ultima. New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1994.

Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations. Ed. and Intro. Michael Sells. Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1999. [Selections/handout].

Anderson, Hans Christian. "The Little Sea Maid." [handout]

Barnaby, Karin. "Dreams as Literature." Quadrant XXIV (1): 75-81. [handout]

Berry, Wendell. "Community in 17 Sensible Steps." Beats Community and Society. From a speech delivered November 11, 1994 at the 23rd annual meeting of the Northern Plains Resource Council. <http://www.utne.com/lens/cs/11cswberry.html>

Boggs, Grace Lee. "Sustainable Activism." Ann Arbor: U of M Lecture Series on Sustainable Development, Community, and Business, April 1, 1999. [handout]

Boggs, Grace Lee. Education to Govern: A Philosophy and Program for Learning Now. Detroit: Advocators, 1974. [handout]

Dahlerup, Pil. Coordinator. "Splash! Six Views of 'The Little Mermaid.'" Scandinavian Studies n.d.: 75-81. [handout]

Hazen, Mary Ann. "Learning How to Learn: An Experiment in Dialogue." The Organizational Behavior Teaching Review: Journal of the Organizational Behavior Teaching Society XII (2) : 72-85. [handout]

Hazen's article is CENTRAL to our theory and praxis of building sustainable learning communities.

Lawsin, Emily P. "Brushin' Brush Park." [handout]

Mahfouz, Naquib. Midaq Alley. New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1992.

Morrison, Toni. Beloved. New York: Penguin, 1999.

Mukerjee, Bharati. Jasmine. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1989.

Okri, Ben. The Famished Road. New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1992.

Sapphire. Push. New York: Random House/Vintage, 1996.

Tan, Amy. The Joy Luck Club. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Selected folktales, stories, handouts, videos:

"Cinderella"

"East of the Sun, West of the Moon"

"Anansi"

Movers/Campbell: The Power of Myth

Selections: Talks with Writers

Cherokee Oral Teaching. “Cosmic Law: Sacred Law of the Ancient Ancestors.”
“Designed and Natural Environments.” [graphic]
“How to Build Community.” Graphic

films

Akkad, Moustapha. The Message: The Story of Islam. [This is a long film, but it is very important for those of us who are only familiar with Islam in a limited way. It will enhance our experience and understanding of Mahfouz.]

Alexie, Sherman. Smoke Signals.

American History X.

The Joy Luck Club.

The Shadow of Hate in America.

Beloved.

Disney. The Little Mermaid.

Long Night’s Journey into Day.

Menace II Society.

course requirements

“Reflection” should be understood not simply as an act of thought, but rather as an attitude. It is privilege born of human freedom in contradistinction to the compulsion of natural law. As the world itself testifies (“reflection” means literally “bending back”), reflection is a spiritual act that runs counter to the natural process: an act whereby we stop, call something to mind, form a picture, and take up a relation to and come to terms with what we have seen. It should, therefore, be understood as an act of becoming conscious.

--C.G. Jung, (CW 11)

Because this section of English 236 is writing intensive, the core of your work will center on your response/reflection journal: in-class written reflection, in-class focused free expression, and notes that you take during class or in small learning groups. **Therefore, it is necessary that you bring your journal with you to each class meeting and that you use it during our work together.**

Journal: Your response journal will be the primary instrument for gathering your increments of insight in our work together. [See handout on reflection journal.] This is the place for wrapping words around what is happening to you as you encounter “the everything” out of which our work together will be made.

Pay attention to what affirms you, puzzles you, angers you, challenges your present sitting place, and most of all, what attracts you--negatively or positively. Use Sister Christian’s maps of feelings, your positive pink responses and your negative blue responses. Our feelings are engaged before we are able to sift and sort through what is happening to us.

Following the Cherokee, we will explore all aspects of our emergent insights--emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, and sexual.

Your journal response work is private. If you wish, you may share it with your learning partner or in your small work group. It is the generating vector of your written reflections that you will share with our whole class. After you analyze and discern what insight is growing in you, read over all your journal work and synthesize what has gathered in you. **You will be responsible for a written reflection to be handed in at the beginning of each class meeting.** I would appreciate your word processing of this component of your work.

reflective journal focus

*Ponder, wrestle with, search for, and make notes of musings that we can all share out of which we will construct a working description of sustainable learning community. *

Questions and barriers are important intersections in our processes of change. Write down your questions and perhaps make note of prejudices that you perceive/judge to be blocks to your understanding. These moments do not have to be shared unless you choose to bring them to our attention.

At the end of our semester’s work, we might want to publish a gathering of our semester’s harvest. There is wonderful energy in the insights that surface in the course of our work. Making a record of those moments in time will move our community onward.

The service learning component of leadership development also needs to be incorporated into the journal work. We will create this aspect of our work toward building sustainable learning communities together in dialogue.

attendance policy

I will make every effort to attend each class and to be well prepared: I expect you to do the same. If you must miss more than one class, please make an appointment with me. Excessive absence may prevent your successful completion of the course. Thus, I expect you to attend every class session and to arrive on time unless there is serious reason for absence or lateness. If you are late, please join the group, but take a seat near the door so that you do not interrupt or disturb the work of your classmates. In inclement, hazardous

weather, I do not expect you to risk your life to attend class. I do expect you to keep your reading and writing up to date.

I have a notebook in which you will sign your name at the end of each class session. It is your responsibility to make sure that you sign the class attendance register.

The important consideration for each one of us is to identify what is it that each of us brings to growing the multicultural, intergenerational movement to rebuild, respirit, and redefine sustainable learning communities “from the ground up.”

evaluation criteria

Your course grade will be determined by:

- * Class participation: 20% > regular, punctual attendance is a requisite for participation.
- * Journal entries/weekly reflections: 25%
- * Collaborative presentations: 25%
- * Midterm: Draft of Cultural Diversity Essay: 15%
- * Final: Cultural Diversity Essay: 15%

Late work may be subjected to a reduced grade. You have 50% of the power over your grade: I have 50%. Weekly reflections may be revised until they meet the standard and grade that you are seeking.

If you wish to know your course grade before your official transcript arrives, please enclose an index card in a self-addressed stamped envelope in the manila folder with your final cultural diversity essay, and I will mail your grade to you.

course calendar

[proposed]

ingathering--

creating space for the everything out of which all things come

Wednesday evening, January 8, 2003

CREATING THE CIRCLE/OPENING THE EXPLORATIONS

Orientation to our work

First Words: Dialogue with Work/Creating Community

Past/Present/Future Experiences and Expectations

Journal Entry #1:

Assign: Reflection entry:
Select 3 or 4 course objectives
that attract you to focus the place of your beginning energy.

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