

English 245 – 2T, The Experience of Poetry

**The Language of Life--
to celebrate life
to celebrate language:
a way to love this world**

“Poetry allows one to speak with a voice of power that is not, in fact, granted to one by culture.”

--Linda McCarriston

**Summer II, 2003-2004
JoAnne Isbey**

English 245 – 2T
Summer II, 2003-2004
the experience of poetry:
the language of life-myth, metaphor,
and the creation of meaning

Tuesday/Thursday evenings
5:30 – 8:00 p.m.
Briggs 10

course description:

The course of study involves an exploration of the symbolic languages of poetry in which humankind has expressed the search for meaning and reality from the mythic past to the post-modern present through the construction of "secondary imaginative worlds" that bridge and connect the primary human realms of actuality and ideality.

The central metaphor of our semester's work will be our own search/quest/journey for meanings as we encounter the imaginative expressions of poets across culture and across time. From our experiences together, we will identify, gather, and examine how images of "secondary imaginative worlds" express the primary human world issues and events, such as, "otherness," love, marriage, friendship, sexuality, gender, quest for role models, parent/child relationships, religious feelings and beliefs, permanence/transience, change, memory, and history. We will consciously focus on the implications that the expressions and struggles enacted in the "secondary imaginative worlds" of the poets' imagination have for all humankind: past, present, and future.

To enhance our experience of recalling, remembering, and recollecting our intimations of the "poetic secondary worlds," we will engage in conversation: responding, searching, questioning, exploring, dialoguing, and writing individually, in small groups, and as a whole class community. We will "trespass freely and fearlessly" the common ground of poetry. We will make "that country our own country" by teaching ourselves "how to read and how to write, how to preserve, and how to create." [Virginia Woolf]

prerequisite:

That students want to learn how to engage more powerfully and authentically with our rich human heritage of poetry. In other words, that we bring to our study an attitude of openness to what may initially seem “not I,” but what with time and our studied attention may become “I.”

course method:

The course requires a rigorous schedule of reading and is a writing intensive work, designed to enable students to use their own written words to surface and develop their emergent responses and insights; thereby, students bind their own life and learning to themselves in an unfolding integrative process. These are the responses that “are felt to be sacred, enchanting, valuable in themselves.” [W.H. Auden]

In their reading journals, students will follow and develop their initial images and first responses to a poem, grounded on their own perceptions and observations. And then, they will amplify their initial responses in concert with a small group. Finally, together with the whole class, we will shape and articulate an inclusive communal response that bridges both our “primary” and our “secondary” worlds. **It is desirable that students electing the experience of poetry love reading and be willing to read poems over and over and over again until the sound and sense move from “otherness” to “I-ness.”**

Following initial positioning by the teacher, the classroom method will be interactive: in-class focused, written free expression, small group, pupil/team, and open conversation, ultimately seeking answers to the issues that each poem itself raises in the mind and heart of each reader. **Students are expected to be prepared for class: to have read the assigned material, to have studied it, to have recorded their initial responses, reflections, and questions in their reading journals, and to have identified areas that need classroom exploration.**

We will work together to create and maintain a collaborative and sustainable learning community where each of us can be relaxed and focused, sharing questions, knowledge, insights, feelings, and written work freely with each other. Through the creation and maintenance of a low risk culturally inclusive safe learning environment, each of us will be free to try out different strategies and modes of response and interpretation, grounded on constructs of our own unique and complex experiences: emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, religious, and sexual.

course requirements:

All assigned reading and writing are to be completed before the beginning of the class for which they are due. Occasionally, additional materials chosen by the instructor or students may be assigned as these works become appropriate through the unfolding of the course. **None of the works listed will be excluded from your course requirements. If a work is not discussed in class, it may still appear on your midterm or final examination.** It is a holy and wholesome idea to read and re-read and journal ahead of our class discussion. As we engage in the process of giving the poems our “studied attention,” we will make careful note of questions that surface or attract us. We will explore these “seeded questions” in class together. **Please bring your reader response journal to each class meeting.**

Because English 245: The Experience of Poetry is a writing intensive course, the core of the work will center on reader response journal entries, in-class focused written free expression, short reflection papers, a study and presentation of a poet of their choice, a project/portfolio that gathers poems that speak powerfully to them personally, memorizing poems, writing poems, and the choral reading and performance of poems.

We will incorporate our own responses and reflections on our work together: reading, observing, viewing, listening, and discussing the texts and performances that we are experiencing. We will mutually agree on individual/learning partner/small group work after students have focused their choices.

Note well those images that draw you, either negatively or positively, and these key images or seed-topics may cluster into subjects of your journal entries and reflection essays. You will also use your journal for notetaking in class. **If you bump into words that are unfamiliar, look them up in a hardcover dictionary. Do not just skim over them. The dictionary is the reader/writer’s most essential tool. There are no synonyms in poetic diction. The poet/maker writes precisely the word that we see on the page. As reader/responders, we are obliged to look up each word that we do not immediately know. We search out the denotative and connotative meanings and relate these to the context of the particular poem.**

Performance and presentation work, alone or with others, is not to exceed a maximum of 15 minutes, unless you discuss it ahead of time with your classmates and they consent to study the material you are presenting as preparation for your presentation.

attendance, participation and classroom protocol:

Developing and nurturing our love of the language of poetry and of our innate human entitlement to participate in that language requires consistent, sustained effort over time. Thus, students are expected to attend every class session and to arrive on time unless there is serious reason for absence or lateness. There are no excused absences.

If you are late, please join the group, but take a seat near the door so that you do not disturb your classmates' work. If you have a scheduling conflict/overlap, please let me know.

I will take attendance at each class meeting; thus, there is no need to call and announce an intended absence. I assume that if you are absent, you have a good reason for not being in class. If there are extenuating circumstances for prolonged absence, you need to apprise me of them. If you encounter such difficulty that you are considering dropping the course, please see me to discuss other possible options.

learning partners:

Please exchange telephone numbers with a learning partner/classmate, so that you may stay apprised of changes in our course schedule of readings or any other items on the course calendar. In case of severe weather, I do not expect you to risk life or limb to come to class. I do expect you to be responsible for making up missed class session(s).

Your learning partner will be responsible for:

- * taking notes for you,**
- * informing you of assignments/handouts,**
- * handing in or collecting a paper for you,**
- * answering/discussing your unasked questions,**
- * studying together with you,**
- * presenting material with you,**
- * doing your performance with you.**
- * picking up material handed out in class.**

Before you leave this evening, please give me the name and telephone number of your learning partner and the names of persons in your learning group.

videotape protocol:

All of our videotapes will be on the reserve shelf in the library. **They may not be checked out, but they can be viewed in special rooms in the library that have been set aside for that purpose.** We need to be mindful of everyone's needs while scheduling time to view the tapes in the library. **I will return the videos that we use after we complete viewing them. I do not anticipate a problem with accessibility. I often find that the material on a videotape is so complex and rich that I have to view it several times to understand its multiple meanings; thus, you may also want to experience the tapes more than once.**

course grading/evaluation:

Your course grade will be determined by your own evaluation (50%) and my evaluation (50%), based on the following criteria:

- * Class participation: 15%
[regular, punctual attendance is a requisite for participation. In-class written responses may not be made up.]
- * Journal work/in-class responses: 15%
- * Reflective weekly essays: 15%
- * Performance: 10%
- * Project/portfolio: 15%
- * Midterm/Final: 10%
- * Group work: 10%
- * Service Learning: 10%

You may revise your weekly draft copies of your reflective essays to improve your grade. Please staple your revision to your original draft.

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

required texts:

Chamberlin, J. Edward. Come Back to Me My Language: Poetry and the West Indies. Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1993. [Selections to be handed out]

Goodison, Lorna. Selected Poems. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992.

Moyers, Bill and David Grubin, Ed. The Language of Life: A Festival of Poets. New York: Broadway Press, 1996.

Oliver, Mary. A Poetry Handbook: A Prose Guide to Understanding and Writing Poetry. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994. [Selections to be handed out]

Scullin, Robert J., "Transformative Reflection on Service." [handout]

All selected gatherings of poems and readings handed out in class.

course goal:

To deepen and broaden our experience of poetry and to enhance our awareness and enjoyment of that experience. Our particular focus for our work together this semester is on our appreciation of the difference and diversity that inheres in our rich multicultural heritage of poetry: the language of life as it expresses across cultures and across time.

In addition to deepening and broadening our experience of poetry, our work together will seek ways to immerse us by "indwelling" (Polanyi) in actual poet/audience communities. From the inside, we will listen to poetry's major assertions and questions, its governing assumptions, its languages, its evidential contexts, its forms, its discourse conventions, its knowledge, and its modes of knowing.

Organized as a collaborative and interactive investigation of our experience of a scholarly field, poetry, emphasis will be focused on each individual student's own responses, and, at the same time, on each student's becoming an active member of a learning community. We will read and write, not merely for the teacher, but primarily for ourselves and for each other.

Students and the teacher will function as co-investigators of collaborative reading and writing to conduct the inquiry of how we come to know and express our knowledge and experience of poetry. Through the practice of reflective inquiry, student and teacher roles evolve out of their own participation, informed by a profound relationship between ourselves and our primary actual worlds and the secondary, imaginative, ideal worlds projected in the poetry we will study together. **Substantial social knowing will be foregrounded in our thinking and reflection.**

course objectives:

1. To enjoy the experience of poetry more deeply by developing skill, strength, and confidence in inquiring how poetry is produced, understood, and assessed.
2. To increase our ability to ask questions that will illuminate the particular poem under discussion: To define ways of knowing as well as objects of knowledge.
3. To realize the importance of poems as mirrors of human experience, reflecting human feelings, aspirations, motives, conflicts, values, beliefs, and faiths.
4. To view each poem as the verbal issue of a spiritual experience, the response of a gifted writer to certain provocations of a particular time and place, or possibly of life itself.
5. To identify with poetic personas in human situations as a means of relating to others; to gain insight into our own humanity through involvement with "the other" in poetry.

6. To become more familiar with important works of poetry, both past and present.
7. To become more aware of significant poets representing diverse backgrounds and traditions in poetry.
8. To experience poetry as a way to appreciate the rhythms and beauty of our English language, thereby, enhancing our aesthetic sensibilities.

journal work:

*9. To become more aware of our own natural, spontaneous responses as we give our studied attention to a poem. To follow that initial response to a fuller context: BELS, brief entry leads, and extended journal amplifications are methods of exploring our own responses and opening out our meanings as we interact with a poem and explore the art through which the work takes on its power. **Please date all your journal/reflection work. It will mirror your own process more precisely.**

***10. To broaden and deepen our own initial responses to poetry by including and incorporating the responses of our classmates, both in small group process and in our whole community response. We will make note of these emergent insights in writing and hand them in as addenda to our initial reflections. We do not rewrite our first reflection, but we continue to amplify that first work and to include aspects of the poem(s) that we did not find in our initial readings and reflection. This is the important step that permits us to take note of what may appear strange, “other,” foreign, or even frightening to us. In other words, this critical step allows us to make a fuller, more inclusive, and prospective encounter with the poem--to build a community response. Make note of memorable lines in your reflective essays.**

*11. To interpret, analyze, and explain the poems and to share our responses orally and in writing.

*12. To experience integrated learning and to develop habits of reading and reflection that will inspire us to pursue the reading of poetry in our maturing adult lives outside of school: to become an involved audience, maker, or performer of poetry as a life-long pursuit.

***13. To explore many approaches to the poetry that we are studying together this semester, so that we will develop multifaceted ways of responding to the multiplicity of meanings that inhere in a poem as we encounter difference and diversity: gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion, age, and sexuality.**

*14. To engage in “literary conversation” that bridges and connects our primary life experience in the world of actuality with our secondary imaginative experiences in the world of ideality. We will work together to explore the possibilities that our individual readings open up.

***15. To develop an understanding of “otherness” through interactive collaboration in a classroom forum for the free exchange of ideas in a safe place where we can examine different, and even conflicting, points of view in an atmosphere of honest, authentic, and open discussion: to practice respect for and openness to insights that are different from our own.**

*16. To tell our own stories to ourselves and to each other, thereby, coming into a deeper appreciation of differences that eventuate in understanding the richly woven tapestry of cultures that our individual stories make up. **Each of us is a center and a rich resource of the class.** Our work together will encourage respect for each of our own truths, what we care about, and what we want to learn more about.

Nota bene: If you have any impairment that inhibits your learning performance, please see me privately so that we can work together to accommodate your needs.

JoAnne Isbey
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Office hours:

Tuesday: 4:30 – 5:30 p.m.

Thursday: 4:30 – 5:30 p.m.

and other times by appointment.