Literature and Place: Writing Across Borders

Borders are rich areas for contact, exchange, and community formation, but they also figure as sites of extreme violence where divisions are erected and defended. Similarly, the process of border crossing can be transformative, leading to growth and access to new possibilities and freedoms; however, it is often a dangerous and traumatic journey as well, riddled with numerous obstacles, sacrifices, and loss. This course invites students to develop a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding borders and border crossings. By examining a wide range of historical, literary, and theoretical texts that have been written about borders, both literal and figurative, students will analyze how writing itself has the capacity to construct and bridge divisions and difference. Throughout the semester students will produce a portfolio of their own creative and critical writing that charts the evolution of their understanding of borders, responses to specific textual representations of border crossing, and interventions in ongoing debates about immigration, historiography, and individual and national identity formation.

English 162W fulfills the Perspectives (PLAS) requirement in the area of Reading Literature. Students will become familiar with the disciplinary norms associated with literary reading. They will learn to pay close attention to language and be familiar with the reasons for the writer’s particular choice of language. They will learn how the writer uses the techniques and elements of literature and the particular resources of genre to create meaning. They will learn how texts differ from one another and how they interact with the larger society and its historical changes.

Learning Objectives
1. To gain a familiarity with the conventions of academic writing.
2. To learn effective close reading skills by critically engaging with a wide range of literary and theoretical texts on the topic of borders and border crossings.
3. To identify personal strengths and weaknesses in the composition process and discover strategies to improve one’s writing.
4. To develop confidence in critically engaging with, assessing, and intervening in theoretical arguments.
5. To achieve mastery over basic methods of research and documentation according to MLA standards.

Required Texts
The House on Mango Street- Sandra Cisneros (ISBN-10: 0679734775)
Lucy- Jamaica Kincaid (ISBN-10: 0374527350)
My Year of Meats- Ruth Ozeki (ISBN- 10: 0140280464)

*All other required texts will be posted as password-protected pdfs. on the class blog.
Course blog URL: http://english162sp2013.qwriting.org/
Password: english162

[To access these readings visit the course blog. On the menu bar there should be a page titled “Course Schedule.” Click on it, input the password “english162,” and you should be able to download and print the pdfs. for class.]
Course Expectations

Participation
Since this course is a writing seminar, participation is essential. In addition to discussing the texts assigned, you will be doing a number of writing exercises and group activities in class. Participation therefore begins with being present and punctual on a regular basis. If you are absent, you cannot participate and this will be reflected in your final course grade. If you know that you will be absent from class, please inform me beforehand in person or via email. Lateness will also not be tolerated, especially if it becomes a persistent pattern. To be clear, if you arrive a half-an-hour after the beginning of class, you will be marked absent for the day. You are allowed three unexcused absences before it begins to negatively affect your overall course grade, which will be lowered by a third of a letter grade for each subsequent absence. (Two latenesses will count as an absence).

Good participation, however, also entails coming to class prepared, having done the reading and blog responses and/or comments. It also involves having the texts for that day’s assignment in class, being engaged in discussions, and participating in group activities. As a result, your participation grade will factor in your preparedness, the quality of your engagement in class discussions, and your attendance as well as punctuality.

Blogging
This class relies extensively on technology so you must have regular computer and web access. Throughout the course I will be posting announcements, readings, journal prompts, links, etc. on to the course blog. The URL for the course blog is: http://english162sp2013.qwriting.org/
The password for protected pages is: english162

This blog will be accessed through qwriting.org. You are expected to have an active QC email address that you check at least once a day because that is the address used by qwriting.org. It is your responsibility to contact the OCT help desk to make sure that your email account is in working order.

To blog, you must visit qwriting.org and sign up for a username. Remember that you must use your QC email. After creating a username, you should log into qwriting.org and visit the course blog (http://english162sp2013.qwriting.org/). On the right-hand side bar there should be a box titled “Add Users.” You should input the password (english162) and you will be added as an author on the site. This will allow you to post new entries and comments.

For almost every class, students will be expected to make a contribution to the course blog either as a poster or as a commenter. The general guidelines for effective posts and comments are listed below:

1. Posts: Throughout the semester each student will be required to generate two blog responses (each worth 5% of your final grade), which should be uploaded on to the course blog by 6pm the day before class so other students will have ample time to comment. Responses should be well thought out and organized, but do not have to be written as formal papers. Posts should be 300-600 words long and must include at least 2 questions about the assigned reading materials. After we discuss MLA formatting, all quotations should be cited with proper parenthetical citations. (A sign up sheet for blog response dates will be circulated within the first two weeks of class).
2. Comments: During classes where you are not responsible for writing a blog entry, you are expected to comment on someone else’s post. These comments should demonstrate an engagement with other students’ ideas and/or questions. For this reason, commenters are expected to quote at least once from either the original blog entry or any other preceding comments on the page. Comments should be about 50-150 words in length and must be posted no later than 11:30pm the
**Day before class.** You are allowed 3 “freebie” comments over the course of the semester. Any comments that exceed this number will negatively affect your overall commenting grade. Comments will be evaluated not individually, but collectively for a total of 6% of your final grade.

In addition to writing posts and comments, your blogging grade also includes a presentation component. Students who are acting as posters for a particular set of readings are also expected to act as in-class discussants for that day. These are informal presentations. Students can either choose to read their blog post aloud or speak generally about the ideas they wrote about in their response. Discussants should also come to class prepared with at least two questions about the readings to help stimulate class conversation, which can be the same as or different from the questions they posed in their blog response. Discussant presentations are worth 2% for each response for a total of 4% of your final grade.

*I will not accept any late blog responses, comments, or discussant presentations.* These cannot be made up so remember to check your own schedule before signing up for response dates. Let me know well in advance (at least 1-2 weeks beforehand) if you will be absent for a particular class and cannot complete the assignment so we can try to reschedule.

**Papers**

This is a writing seminar so the paper assignments below will constitute a major portion of your final grade.

1. Before each essay is due, we will spend a day workshopping papers in small peer-review groups. Students are expected to come to class with three copies of “complete” drafts, (not outlines or bullet points of their ideas). Peer responses will be evaluated collectively throughout the semester for a total of 5% of your final grade.

2. **Papers** are due on the date they appear in the syllabus. Students should come to class with all of their draft materials in hard copy including peer-review sheets, essay checklists, and rough drafts. I will not grade any paper that is not accompanied with these draft materials. Students are free to hand in a hard copy of their final papers in class, but I will also accept emailed papers.
   - Papers should be sent to my QC email address (ftran@qc.cuny.edu). They are due no later than 11:30pm on the date marked in the syllabus. If you choose to email your papers, I do not want to hear any excuses about Internet connection problems. Also, please remember to check your attachments to make sure you have attached the correct document file.

3. The final grade for a late paper will drop one whole letter grade for every day it is late. For example, a paper that merits a “B” will result in a “C” grade if it is turned in one day late, including weekends. Deadline extensions, though rare, may be granted for extenuating circumstances. Students must consult me for extensions at least one full week before a paper assignment is due.

**Formal Writing Assignments**

These are the major formal writing assignments you will complete throughout the semester along with the important dates attached to each one. We will discuss these assignments in greater detail as they come up.

1. **Close Reading Paper** (2-3 pages)
   - Peer review: 02/20/13 // Due date: 02/25/13

2. **Midterm Paper** (4-5 pages)
   - Peer review: 03/18/13 // Due date: 03/20/13

3. **Final Research Paper**
   - Proposal (2 pages)
     - Due date: 05/01/13
   - Paper (7-10 pages)
     - Peer review: 05/13/13 // Due date: 05/22/13

**Plagiarism** and **academic dishonesty** include but are not limited to:
1. Submitting essays or portions of essays written by other people, including well-intentioned friends and family.
2. Failing to document paraphrases, ideas, or verbatim phrases taken from outside sources.
3. Collaborating on an assignment without the explicit permission of the professor.
4. Submitting an essay written for one course to another course without the explicit permission of both professors.
5. Submitting work as one’s own that has been purchased or copied from a paper preparation service or web site.

Any work submitted to me that has been plagiarized will receive a failing grade and will be reported to the dean. This is a writing class and author integrity is crucial to the mission of the course, so any event of plagiarism will most likely result in a failing course grade.

**Grading**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blogging</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay #1</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay #2</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Paper</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<td>- Proposal (10%)</td>
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<td>- Paper (25%)</td>
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<td>Peer-review Responses</td>
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**Behavioral Policy**

Although most of this falls under what I consider to be “general knowledge,” there are certain kinds of behavior that are unacceptable for a college classroom setting.

1. Absolutely no use of cell phones, iPods, or other disruptive technological or cellular devices in class. While I understand occasional lapses in judgment, I reserve the right to hold on to your cell phone for the duration of class or ask you to leave class entirely if receiving calls or texting becomes a problem. If you need to be available during a class session because of an extenuating circumstance, please let me know.

2. Laptops and iPads are permitted so long as you do not abuse the privilege by surfing the web, checking your email or going on Facebook, etc. during class. I understand that paper and ink are expensive and that most students would prefer to read their documents electronically, but I will revoke this privilege whenever it seems like students are not using them appropriately.

3. Treat fellow classmates with respect and dignity, i.e. no hate speech, insulting comments or superiority complexes. The classroom is a safe learning environment for open, thoughtful, inquisitive discourse where everyone should feel comfortable expressing his or her thoughts at all times.

**Special Accommodations**

If you have a learning, sensory, or physical reason for special accommodation in this class, (including special format/s assignments, auxiliary aids, non-traditional instructional formats, etc.), please inform me in private as soon as possible. You may also contact the Office of Special Services in Kiely Hall, rm. 171.

**Writing Center**

The Writing Center is located in Kiely Hall, rm. 229. Tutors there are trained to help you revise your writing at various stages. If you believe you need additional help with your writing, feel free to consult them. You can also get help by visiting their website (http://qc.pages.qc.edu/qcwsw).
Office Hours
My office hours exist for you so please do not feel like you will be interrupting me if you stop in. I am glad to continue discussions from class, talk about paper drafts, clarify readings and assignments, or offer any other course-related advice you might need. My normal office hour is scheduled for Wednesday from 9:30-10:30am, but if you would like to meet outside of office hours, please let me know and we can set up an appointment.

Statement of Contractual Obligation

This syllabus is your contract with me and by choosing to remain in this course, you agree to abide by the above policies and procedures. If you feel you are unable to fulfill any of the terms of this syllabus, please contact me immediately so we can make arrangements if possible.

Tentative Course Schedule

M. 01/28  Introductions
Writing workshop: Write a letter to me…

Bodies and Borders

W. 01/30  Zitkala-Sa, “The School Days of an Indian Girl”
Writing workshop: Composing effective responses/comments, Question types

Writing workshop: Close reading

W. 02/06  Thomas King, “Joe the Painter and the Deer Island Massacre,” “A Coyote Columbus Story,” “Borders,” One Good Story, That One (1993)
Writing workshop: Close reading

Writing workshop: Thesis construction

Writing workshop: MLA citation

M. 02/18  President’s Day- college closed
W. 02/20  Classes follow a Monday schedule
Peer Review (First Assignment)

Crossing Borders of Time and Trauma

Writing workshop: Selecting effective quotes

*First Assignment Due

W. 02/27  W.D. Ehrhart, “Midnight at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial”
George Bilgere, “At the Vietnam Memorial”
Duong Tuong, “At the Vietnam Wall,”
Fran Castan, “Unveiling the Vietnam Memorial”
Writing workshop: Explicating and analyzing poetry

M. 03/04

Writing workshop: Close reading screenplays

W. 03/06

Writing workshop: PIE paragraphs

M. 03/11
Art Spiegelman, *Maus I: A Survivor’s Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (1986)- Chapters 1-3

Writing workshop: Close reading graphic novels

W. 03/13
Art Spiegelman, *Maus I: A Survivor’s Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (1986)- Chapters 4-6

Writing workshop: Brainstorming

M. 03/18
*Peer Review (Second Assignment)*

Writing workshop: Introducing/ integrating quotes

W. 04/24
*Class canceled for student conferences*

M. 05/06
Ruth Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* (1999)- Chapters 9-12 & Epilogue


Writing workshop: Introducing/ integrating quotes

W. 05/08
*Final Paper Due*