



**Spring 2020 Syllabus
Overview**

Theme: How We Tell Our Stories

NOTES: All readings are due on the date listed. Please consult the detailed syllabus for unit descriptions and reading and discussion questions.

A written reading response is due each Monday unless otherwise noted.

Date	Subject	Reading Assignment Due
Thursday, January 16	ALL FACULTY	Spring Preview: Diving in to How We Tell Our Stories
Monday, January 20	NO CLASS	Martin Luther King Jr. Day – no class tonight
Thursday, January 23	U.S. HISTORY	Race, Reconstruction and (Reverse) Discrimination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>, “Preface” and Chapters I-V • Kendi, <i>Stamped from the Beginning</i> (pp 177-190, 235-247)
Monday, January 27	U.S. HISTORY	Highs and Lows: W.E.B. DuBois, the North and the South <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>, Chapters VI-IX • Kendi, <i>Stamped from the Beginning</i> (pp 269-279, 295-307) • Response paper 1 due
Thursday, January 30	ART HISTORY	Seeing through Photographs with Frederick Douglass <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gates, “Frederick Douglass’s Camera Obscura,” from <i>Vision & Justice</i> (course reader)
Monday, February 3	U.S. HISTORY	World War I, World War II and The War for Civil Rights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>, Chapters X, XI, Appendix • Kendi, <i>Stamped from the Beginning</i> (pp 308-322, 349-364) • Response paper 2 due
Thursday, February 6	U.S. HISTORY	Angela Davis and Our Racial Story <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kendi, <i>Stamped from the Beginning</i> (pp 393-409, 424-439)
Monday, February 10	WRITING	The Writing Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>EasyWriter</i>, Chapter 1, “A Writer’s Choice”; Chapter 2, “Exploring, Planning, and Drafting” • Orwell, “Why I Write” (course packet)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spring Formal Essay Assignment Sheet
Thursday, February 13	U.S. HISTORY	New Politics, New Discussions, Old Story <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kendi, <i>Stamped from the Beginning</i> (pp 456-468, 482-511) • “A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, and Justice” (online)
Monday, February 17	WRITING	Evidence and Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>They Say/I Say</i>, Chapter 10 “But Don’t Get Me Wrong” • Optional, Reread <i>They Say/I Say</i> Chapter 3, “As He Himself Puts It” • <i>EasyWriter</i>, Chapter 2, sections 2c-2e • Sawyer’s “Thesis Statements: Four Steps to a Great Essay” (online) • See detailed syllabus for writing assignment
Thursday, February 20	WRITING	Revision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>EasyWriter</i>, Chapter 4, “Reviewing, Revising, and Editing” • “Reorganizing Drafts,” (online) • See detailed syllabus for further instructions and assignment • Rough draft of spring formal paper due
Monday, February 24	COLLEGE FAIR	Free Minds College Fair We’ll be meeting representatives from colleges all around town, so come with questions! **Spring Formal Paper Due**
Thursday, February 27	CREATIVE WRITING	Poetry: Getting Started <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sol, <i>How a Poem Moves</i>, “Introduction” (course reader) • Poems by Alexander, Collins, Hayden, and Howe, Miller Williams, and William Carlos Williams (course reader) • <i>American Journal</i>, Introduction: This is Why and Girmay, “Second Estrangement” • See detailed syllabus for writing assignment
Monday, March 2	CREATIVE WRITING	Odes: Songs of Praise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sol, <i>How a Poem Moves</i>, “How a Poem Invites Us to Praise” (course reader) • Poems by Clifton, Gay, Lee, Neruda, Smith, Zagajewski (course reader) • See detailed syllabus for writing assignment
Thursday, March 5	CREATIVE WRITING	Poems about Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sol, <i>How a Poem Moves</i>, “How a Poem Transforms a Stroll into a ceremony” (course reader) • Poems by Hughes, Forché, Harjo, Wright, and Yeats (course reader)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>American Journal</i>, poems by De La Paz, Hayes, and Wright • See detailed syllabus for writing assignment
Monday, March 9	CREATIVE WRITING	Poems as Self-Portrait <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poems by Blanco, Clifton, Hikmet, Levis, Olds, and Soto (course reader) • <i>American Journal</i>, poems by Hong, Kelly, Sánchez, Young • See detailed syllabus for writing assignment
Thursday, March 12	CREATIVE WRITING	Ekphrasis: Writing About Art <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poems by Auden, Williams, Cisneros, Daniels, Guerrero, Komunyakaa (course reader) • <i>American Journal</i>, poems by Szybist and Scafidì • see detailed syllabus for writing assignment
Monday, March 16	NO CLASS	Enjoy your spring break!
Thursday, March 19	NO CLASS	Enjoy your spring break!
Monday, March 23	CREATIVE WRITING	Poems About Family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poems by Alexander, Komunyakaa, Levine, and Roethke (course reader) • <i>American Journal</i>, poems by Chang, Diaz, Francis, Philips, and Young • See detailed syllabus for writing assignment
Thursday, March 26	CREATIVE WRITING	The World at Large: Poetry About Conflict and Justice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poems by Amichai, Brooks, Larkin, and Johnston (course reader) • <i>American Journal</i>, poems by Harjo, Jackson, Kaminsky, Purpura, Soldier, and Smith • See detailed syllabus for writing assignment
Monday, March 30	CREATIVE WRITING	Poems About Endings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poems by Adonis and Harjo (course reader) • <i>American Journal</i>, poems by Brown, Doty, Limón, and Trethewey • See detailed syllabus for writing assignment
Thursday, April 2	CREATIVE WRITING	Sharing Our Poems The Creative Writing Unit culminates with a class presentation of our poems. **Poetry Collection Due**
Monday, April 6	LITERATURE	Where We Live <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisneros, <i>The House on Mango Street</i>, from “The House on Mango Street” through “Darius and the Clouds” • Response paper 3 due
Thursday, April 9	LITERATURE	The Lives of Women

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cisneros, <i>The House on Mango Street</i>, from “And some more” through “Rafaela who drinks coconut and papaya juice on Tuesday”
Monday, April 13	LITERATURE	<p>From a House to a Home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cisneros, <i>The House on Mango Street</i>, from “Sally” to end of the novel Response paper 4 due
Thursday, April 16	LITERATURE	<p>Writing Esperanza’s Story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cisneros, <i>The House on Mango Street</i>, “Introduction” Cisneros, “Hydra House” (course reader)
Monday, April 20	WRITING	<p>Reflection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> See detailed syllabus for writing assignment
Thursday, April 23	ART HISTORY	<p>Visit to the Blanton Museum of Art, UT Austin Campus</p>
Monday, April 27	ART HISTORY	<p>Seeing through Photographs with Lorna Simpson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jefferson, “Introduction to Lorna Simpson,” from <i>Vision & Justice</i> (course reader) “Artist Lorna Simpson, part 1: photographer, printmaker” (YouTube video) Response paper 5 due
Thursday, April 30	PHILOSOPHY	<p>What Can a Philosopher Know</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plato, <i>Republic</i>, Book VII. Concentrate on 514a-519e and 535a-436d
Monday, May 4	PHILOSOPHY	<p>How Bad Can Things Get?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plato, <i>Republic</i>, Book VIII. Concentrate on 544d-546c and 561a-b Response paper 6 due
Thursday, May 7	PHILOSOPHY	<p>Are You Happy Now, Thrasymachus?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plato, <i>Republic</i>, Book IX. Concentrate on 580a-c and 583b-588b
Monday, May 11	PHILOSOPHY	<p>Impersonating Poetry: Imitator, Maker, or User</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plato, <i>Republic</i>, Book X. Concentrate on 595a-608b Response paper 7 due
Thursday, May 14	LAST CLASS	<p>Final portfolio and portfolio essay due tonight.</p>
Monday, May 18		<p>One-on-one portfolio conferences are scheduled for this day.</p>

Graduation is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, May 26.

ANALYTIC WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Reading Response Papers: For each Monday class in our U.S. history, art history, literature, and philosophy units, you will turn in a written response in answer to a question or questions posed in the syllabus. Response papers should be about a page in length.

The goal of these responses is to help you grapple with the texts. Through writing, you might find your understanding of assigned readings improves, or that you are left with more questions. Either way, response papers lay the groundwork for our productive in-class discussions. **It is important to submit them on time, at the beginning of class.**

Grading: You will be assigned a total of seven response papers this semester, each graded on a 10-point scale; your lowest grade will be dropped.

If you miss class, you should email the assignment that day to lauriefilipelli@gmail.com, or text it to 512-415-6882. Email is preferred, but texting clear photos of handwritten responses is acceptable.

You may also hand a paper in the next class period for a maximum of half credit.

NOTE: Response papers WILL NOT be accepted more than one class period after the original due date.

Formal Paper: You will hand in one 3.5–4 page typed formal paper this semester. This paper will require that you incorporate the various writing skills you have learned as you analyze a text for our history unit. Because planning and revision are essential, **10 % of your grade will be based upon the timely completion of a paper proposal and rough draft.**

Portfolio: At the end of the semester, you will review all of the writing you have done for Free Minds, and decide upon three pieces you would like to include in a final portfolio. As part of this portfolio, you will also write a 2-3 page reflective essay about your process and your growth as a thinker, reader, and writer. The goal of the portfolio is to showcase a selection of your work, and to reflect on your progress over time.

NOTE: You will also have several Creative Writing assignments this semester, including a poetry collection due at the end of the Creative Writing unit. These assignments are listed in the Creative Writing portion of the syllabus and will be evaluated by Vivé Griffith.

DETAILED SYLLABUS

Always read this section before preparing for class

Thursday, January 16

Spring Orientation

We will start off the semester by previewing the themes, texts, and key assignments that we will journey through together in the months ahead. We'll take a moment to review our class policies and procedures and dive into our discussion.

Monday, January 20

In observance of MLK Day, we will not meet for class.

Thursday, January 23

U.S. History Unit with Dr. Samuel Echevarria-Cruz

U.S. History Class 5: Race, Reconstruction and (Reverse) Discrimination

Frederick Douglass Background:

Born around 1817 in Maryland, Frederick Douglass came of age during a transformation. The movement to abolish slavery gained steam when Northern whites such as William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips joined black activists to raise public awareness about the evils of slavery. However, their efforts were met with considerable resistance. Abolitionist literature, such as *Walker's Appeal* and Garrison's newspaper, *The Liberator*, was declared illegal in the South. Southern Congressmen used their political power to table all antislavery petitions in Congress, a policy that lasted from the mid- 1830s until the War with Mexico (1846-1848) forced the issue. From the 1830s through the Civil War, abolitionists built their movement by publicizing narratives by former slaves and other eyewitnesses to slavery and by providing formerly enslaved people a public platform to speak out against slavery.

Because the laws in Southern states barred enslaved people from learning to read and write, their accounts were often regarded with suspicion. Slave narrators had to strike a fine balance between being very particular about their own experience and claiming to speak about the problem of slavery in general. Frederick Douglass was among the most popular of these fugitive and formerly enslaved narrators and activists. After the publication of his *Narrative* in 1845, he became so well known that he had to move to England to avoid recapture. Upon his return in 1847, he moved to Rochester, NY where he published his own anti-slavery newspaper, *The North Star*. He was present at the nearby Seneca Falls Convention for women's rights and participated widely in anti-slavery and reformist politics.

Historical Background:

As the result of the availability of land in the Southern interior of the US, the invention of the cotton

gin (a machine making it easier to separate the cotton ball from the plant), the introduction of vastly more efficient steam-powered boats, and a high demand for cotton in industrializing parts of the world, the shape and scope of American slavery transformed in the decades leading up to the Civil War. Over 1.2 million enslaved people were “redistributed” through the domestic slave trade from the upper South (Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky, etc.) to areas of increased demand for slaves such as Mississippi and Louisiana. The crops produced by slave labor and enslaved people themselves as currency and capital formed the basis of the nation’s growing economy.

With wholly Northern support, Abraham Lincoln was elected President in 1861 without even campaigning in the Southern states. Surmising that Lincoln would not support their interests, most of the slaveholding states seceded from the United States and formed the Confederate States of America, a move that prompted four years of horrific but transformational war. Although Lincoln, whose primary goal was to preserve the Union, had not planned on freeing the slaves, it became apparent early in the conduct of the war that enslaved people were fleeing their masters and freeing themselves. As the War dragged on and with the urging of advisers like Frederick Douglass, the U.S. began to admit black soldiers into the Union Army, including two of Douglass’s sons. By the end of the war, almost 180,000 black troops had served.

When the Civil War ended in 1865, the United States was in a state of transition. Reconstruction, as this period in history is usually called, refers to the rebuilding of the South as well as the intense reordering of the entire nation in the aftermath of the war. There was especially intense disagreement over whether or how to secure the freedom and status of formerly enslaved people. A flurry of legislative activity followed with the passage of the **13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution** from 1865 to 1870. These amendments outlawed slavery, defined American citizenship, and granted voting rights to black men. Southern states responded with repressive legislation, known as Black Codes; Southern white citizens organized violent vigilante organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and the White League. Black Americans also organized, built schools, held office, and advocated for their interests.

Pushing the Reconstruction era amendments through Congress required that advocates for an expanded citizenship for African Americans cooperate with those who represented the corporate interests and large-scale industry that had profited immensely from the waging of war. In fact, the 14th Amendment was particularly beneficial for national corporations, especially railroad, steel, oil, and communications industries which grew exponentially in the decades after the war. The conflict between business interests and workers was explosive during this era of increased social and economic stratification. Especially in times of economic downturn such as the Panic of 1878, industrial workers began to organize themselves and engage in collective action against their employers.

Read:

- Frederick Douglass, *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) “Preface” by William Lloyd Garrison and Chapters I-V
- *Stamped from the Beginning* (pp 177-190, 235-247)

Discussion Questions:

- What are the circumstances surrounding Douglass’s birth?

- Why is the violence of Aunt Hester’s beating so vividly portrayed?
- How was the issue of Black suffrage dealt with in different groups? How was women’s suffrage affected?
- Overall, how does Reconstruction use Black Codes to “reconstruct slavery”?

Monday, January 27

U.S. History Class 6: Highs and Lows: W.E.B. DuBois, the North and the South

Background: The rights of black people were protected in the South as long as the Union army occupied the region. In 1877, as part of a compromise to settle the extremely close presidential election, the troops pulled out of the southern states leaving black Americans to fend for themselves. As the political climate shifted, Southern legislatures began to impose severe restrictions on African American’s civil liberties, including disenfranchisement and the legal segregation of public spaces. Segregation, or “separate but equal” was affirmed as the law of the land by the US Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). The number of lynchings and other forms of terroristic violence against black people skyrocketed and would remain a prominent feature of Southern life for several decades.

Black leaders responded to these developments in a wide variety of ways. Arguably one of the most significant leaders of the late 19th early 20th century, Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) was born a slave in Virginia and was educated at Hampton Institute, a school which trained African Americans in the practical skills needed to make a living in the segregated South. In 1881, he started a similar school in Alabama called Tuskegee Institute. He advocated for black institutions and businesses, and brokered power relationships between black leaders and sympathetic whites at the turn of the century. His 1895 “Atlanta Compromise Speech” catapulted him to fame, chiefly because it was recognized as a blueprint for how white and black Southerners might accommodate each other’s interests under segregation.

Other black leaders challenged Washington’s vision. His chief rival, William Edward Burghardt DuBois (1868-1963), was born and raised in Massachusetts. DuBois was educated at Fisk University, a historically black college in Nashville, Tennessee, and became the first African American to receive a doctorate in History from Harvard University. In 1905, he and other activist founded the Niagara Movement which issued its Declaration of Principles. In 1909, this group helped to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the nation’s leading civil rights organization during the first half of the century. The feminist reporter and newspaper editor, Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931), was one of the earliest activists directly addressing the violence facing black communities in the South (also a founding member of the NAACP). After her friends were lynched in Memphis, Wells-Barnett traveled the South to investigate subsequent lynchings. She issued numerous pamphlets, including *Southern Horrors* (1892) aimed at publicizing these crimes and seeking justice for the victims.

Read:

- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Chapters VI-IX
- *Stamped from the Beginning* (pp 269-279, 295-307)

Response Paper Prompt: Near the turn of the 20th century, African Americans tried to integrate into American political, social, educational and economic life as full citizens. Select one of these dimensions (educational, social, economic, or legal/political). First summarize the pressures and struggles African Americans faced in this realm, and then reflect upon why these particular struggles interest you. Support your ideas with quotes from one of the readings.

Discussion Questions:

- Why was literacy so important to Douglass?
- How is religion and/or faith written about by Douglass?
- Why did lynching increase in the South during this era?

Thursday, January 30

Art History Unit with Dr. Janis Bergman-Carton

How We Tell Stories with Photographs

Unit Overview: It's hard to imagine a world without photography. From selfies and family portraits to school pictures and wedding photos, photography has become so ingrained in our modern culture that it's almost second nature, making it easy to forget that it's a relatively new concept.

Photography was invented less than 200 years ago. The new technology made it possible for people previously invisible in art forms like painting or sculpture (that were typically commissioned by and for a small wealthy elite) to have access to the power of visual images. In other words, photography helped to democratize visual culture. It was affordable, accessible to almost everyone, and capable of broad impact when reproduced for publication in newspapers and magazines.

Few people in the nineteenth century better understood the potential of photography than Frederick Douglass, the focus of our first art history class in the spring. Douglass arranged to sit for over 160 different photographic portraits, significantly more than Abraham Lincoln. He also wrote extensively about photography. Douglass, a former slave who became one of the country's leading abolitionists, social reformers, and orators, made use of the new invention not only as a means of representation but also as a political tool. We will study Douglass's photographic portraits in relation to his ideas about the potential of such portraits to act as agents for social change.

In our final class, we will study Lorna Simpson, a brilliant contemporary artist of color who also makes use of photography as a political tool. We will examine Simpson's use of the medium of photography to challenge longstanding beliefs about fixed racial and gender identity.

Art History Class 7: Seeing through Photographs with Frederick Douglass

Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation abolished slavery but Frederick Douglass understood it would take more than words and war for the humanity and dignity of African-Americans to register publicly in nineteenth-century United States. Douglass had seen enough caricatures that falsely represented blacks as subjugated by nature to justify white supremacy to know it would take more than

proclamations and laws to challenge his nation's racism. We will look at how Douglass harnessed the new technology of photography before and after the Civil War to show the country what black freedom and dignity looks like.

Read:

- Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Frederick Douglass's Camera Obscura," from *Vision & Justice*, a special issue of *Aperture* guest edited by Sarah Lewis (Summer 2016) (course reader)

Discussion question:

Gates includes a line from the autobiography Douglass wrote and published in 1845: "You have seen how man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man." Why does Gates include this quote in his essay? How might we think about the quote in relation to the over 160 photographic portraits Douglass had made of himself?

Monday, February 3

U.S. History Class 7: World War I, World War II and The War for Civil Rights

Background: The period between the world wars and soon after brought seismic changes in U.S. society that set the patterns of policies, actions and thoughts about race that are still with us today. We jump from Douglass's powerful ending of his story to the beginning of a new story, namely of "modern" America, where economic and social changes highlight suburbs, inner city "ghettos" with the famous Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) framing this new "reality" in racialized America.

Read:

- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative*, Chapters X, XI, and "Appendix"
- *Stamped from the Beginning* (pp 308-322, 349-364)

Response Paper Prompt: What were the resources and mechanisms used to create the modern white, suburban communities immediately after WWII? Why are housing and neighborhoods so important in being able to tell the racist story of people of color? Support your ideas with quotes from one of the readings.

Discussion Questions:

- How did the battle with Covey shape Douglass' understanding of himself and the institution of slavery? Why do you think Douglass included so much detail about the violence?
- How is Douglass's discussion of the difference between the North and South in terms of being black compare to the 20th century information you have learned?
- What are some of the ideas about Blacks that are being debated during this time?
- Why is *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) an assimilationist decision in its thinking and outlook when it comes to race?

U.S. History Class 8: Angela Davis and Our Racial Story

Background: The Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) overturned the legal doctrine of separate but equal (but not assimilationist thinking!); however, the battle for equality for people of color and women was far from over. Indeed, the 1960s witnessed an explosion of social movements engaged in a tactic called non-violent direct-action social protest, which saw people challenging the legal and extra-legal practices of discrimination in the places where it occurred. With the popularization of television, images of peaceful, non-violent protestors being attacked by police dogs and water hoses had a powerful impact across the nation and around the world. The leadership and persuasive oratory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came to symbolize this movement, though it is important to note that the movement was much larger than King. His “I Have a Dream” speech, delivered at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom is perhaps his best-known speech. The actions of civil rights protestors put pressure on President Lyndon Baines Johnson’s administration to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968, also known as the Fair Housing Act.

King’s non-violent direct action was not the only strategy for achieving black rights, however. Voices of opposition to the heavily Christian influenced Civil Rights organizations emerged, especially those in the northern and western states recognized that the flurry of legislative activity did little to address the effects of *de facto* segregation in their lives. One of the more influential voices was that of Malcolm X, who gained prominence as a spokesman for the Nation of Islam before launching out on his own. His 1964 speech, “The Ballot or the Bullet” distills some of these alternate visions for black politics and cultural life. Malcolm X influenced a younger generation of Civil Rights leaders who became disillusioned with the slow pace of change after the flurry of legislative action.

The civil rights movement also had an impact well beyond the African American community. Non-black activists, many of whom worked in civil rights campaigns, began using the tactics and strategies they learned in the Black freedom struggle to create social movements among students, Latinos, Native Americans, women, and the LGBTQ community. A leader in the American feminist movement and co-founder of the influential Ms. Magazine, Gloria Steinem published “After Black Power, Women’s Liberation” which charted the link between the two calls for social justice and galvanized a generation of women activists. In seeking to bring women from different racial, cultural, and class backgrounds together, the feminist movement was often divided and divisive. Black feminists often took the lead in trying to find common ground, forming the Combahee River Collective to do “political work within our own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements.” Angela Davis is the summative example of these efforts, bridging the gap between feminism and antiracism struggles.

Read:

- *Stamped from the Beginning* (pp 393-409, 424-439)

Discussion Questions:

- Why do you think the black power movement is so important to understanding racial tensions during the 1960's and 1970's?
- How do drugs and drug policies change the nature of the story about black people, crime, and social change?

Monday, February 10

Writing Unit with Laurie Filipelli, MA, MFA

“Nothing is ever so good that it can’t stand a little revision, and nothing is ever so impossible and broken down that a try at fixing it is out of the question.”

— Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*

Unit Overview:

As we write and rewrite, we find our way toward a better understanding of ourselves and the texts we read. We revise to communicate this understanding clearly and with confidence.

In our spring analytic writing unit, we will build on the skills we developed together in the fall. Having already written three formal papers—a character profile, a description, and a summary—you will now bring together the skills you have learned in a 3.5–4 page analysis.

Your spring formal paper will ask you to respond to one of the key readings from the U.S. History unit, the classic slave narrative by Frederick Douglass. This paper should highlight your capacity to think deeply about a text. You will include a strong thesis, summarize key elements of a text, and use quotes to effectively support your ideas. As we move through the paper writing process, you will reorganize to create a logical flow of ideas. Of course, proofreading for errors is also a must.

Be diligent, love words, read aloud as you revise and, above all, be patient. Your efforts will pay off!

Texts:

Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*

Lunsford, *EasyWriter*

Course Reader Selections

Writing Class 7: The Writing Process

Focus: What motivates us to write? What stands in our way? Tonight we will discuss the different ways each of us approaches the writing process and how it varies depending on the assignment and our own personal investment. We will define analysis and explore the possibilities of our formal essay prompt before settling on topics, creating working thesis statements, and formulating possible essay structures.

Read:

- *EasyWriter*, Chapter 1, “A Writer’s Choices” and Chapter 2, “Exploring, Planning, and Drafting”
- George Orwell’s “Why I Write” (course reader)
- Spring Formal Essay Assignment Sheet

Annotate and write:

- Annotate (highlight and write questions or comments in the margin) two or three points from Orwell’s essay that interest you. Write comments or questions in the margin.
- Review your formal paper assignment sheet and create a list of 4-5 questions for each potential topic before you settle on Option 1 or Option 2. What would you need to know in order to write a successful paper? You may wish to refer to section 2A, “Exploring a Topic” in Chapter 2 of *EasyWriter*.

Bring: *Easywriter*, the assignment sheet and exploratory questions, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* with annotations.

Thursday, February 13

U.S. History Class 9: New Politics, New Discussions, Old Story

Background: What are the legacies of the social movement politics and organizing of the 1960s and 1970s? Many have argued that the election of Barack Obama as President in 2008 represented a fruition of the Civil Rights era. Others have pointed out that the black community and other communities of color continue to suffer disproportionately from economic inequality, police brutality, disparities in the criminal justice and education systems, etc. In 2013, the momentum for a new social movement, #BlackLivesMatter, began to build as a response to a rapid succession of highly publicized police shootings of young African American men and women. I have included “**A Vision for Black Lives,**” the policy statement of the Movement for Black Lives as part of the reading for this class period.

Read:

- *Stamped from the Beginning* (pp 456-468, 482-511)
- The Movement for Black Lives, “A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, and Justice” (<https://policy.m4bl.org/>)

Discussion Questions:

- How do politics, domestic policies and popular ideas turn into the idea of “color-blindness”
- How does President Obama represent the many “stories” around race in the U.S.? What words about him and by him were most helpful to you in understanding where we are in society?
- Which area of the Black Lives Matter policy statement most interested you? Why?

Monday, February 17

Writing Class 8: Evidence and Analysis

Focus: How do we effectively use examples to make a point? And how can we be sure our points are clear and thought-provoking?

Read:

- *They Say/I Say* Chapter 10 “But Don’t Get Me Wrong”
- *EasyWriter*, Chapter 2, sections 2c-2e
- Optional, Reread *They Say/I Say* Chapter 3, “As He Himself Puts It”

Watch:

- Jenny Sawyer’s “Thesis Statements: Four Steps to a Great Essay” <https://tinyurl.com/o96qp87>

Annotate and write:

- **Review and annotate three compelling sections of *Narrative of Frederick Douglass***, highlighting key points that support the working thesis of your formal paper.
- Using your notes from last class as a guide, compose a **1–2 paragraph paper proposal**, or writing plan. As part of your plan you may wish to include the following:
 - Which option have you chosen to answer? Why?
 - What is your working thesis?
 - Where might you find key evidence? What do you hope this evidence will reveal?
 - How might you structure your essay?

This proposal is not a formal paper, but it should be coherent. Completion of your proposal will count toward your final grade. **Please bring two copies to class.**

Bring: *Easywriter*, the assignment sheet for your Spring Formal Paper, *They Say/I Say*, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, **TWO copies of your paper proposal**

Thursday, February 20

Writing Class 9: Revision

Focus: How do we test the logic of our ideas and create better flow in our writing? In this class we will focus on revising the structure of our essays, reviewing each paragraph to see how it relates to the thesis and to the rest of the essay. **Be sure to bring a rough draft of your essay, along with a “reverse outline” outline** based on what you’ve written so far. (See assigned reading and writing below.)

Read:

- *EasyWriter*, Chapter 4, *Reviewing, Revising, and Editing*
- “Reorganizing Drafts,” online handout from the *Writing Center at The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill* <https://tinyurl.com/warnnut>

Write: A rough draft of your final essay, at least three pages long. Let your ideas spill out; this draft can be rather muddled and wordy; the more you write, the more useful class will be. While the organization may be rough, please work to include a thesis (it need not be perfect) as well as examples from the text that support your ideas. *After* you have composed your draft, create a *reverse outline* following the “Make the outline” instructions in the “Reorganizing Drafts” online handout.

<https://tinyurl.com/warnnut>

NOTE: FORMAL PAPERS ARE DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS MONDAY FEBRUARY 24.

Monday, February 24

College Fair – you will have the opportunity to meet representatives from local colleges, submit financial aid application, and get tips for college success.

*****Formal papers due*****

Thursday, February 27

Creative Writing Unit with Vivé Griffith, MFA

*The purpose of poetry is to remind us
how difficult it is to remain just one person,
for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors,
and invisible guests come in and out at will.*

—Czeslaw Milosz

Unit Overview

For the Creative Writing unit this spring, we will focus on one genre (type) of writing: Poetry.

The first poems we know of are the great epics, poems like *The Odyssey* that tell the stories of a culture and a people. They were created to be sung, and the rhythm and rhyme we now think of as essential to poetry were part of the song. Those musical qualities also served as mnemonic devices, enabling the bard to remember what to sing. (This still happens today. Think of how you can remember the lyrics of a song you haven't heard in many years.) But the epic poems also offered a strong sense of a culture. For example, we know that hospitality was important to the Ancient Greeks in part because in *The Odyssey* the character of Odysseus comes home disguised as a stranger. He is welcomed in and his feet are cleansed with oil, because guests are treated with respect in that world.

In this unit we will explore contemporary and 20th century poets, and we'll look at the poems by the themes of the work, including celebration, place, social justice, and loss. You will read about 10 poems for each class period, taking time to read them several times and to hear them aloud.

Alongside that, we will consider the *craft* of poetry, the specific decisions poets make in language, style, structure, and image that bring a poem to life. And we will work on bringing those elements of craft into our own writing by composing and revising poems. I strongly believe that whether or not we want to become poets, practicing the craft of poetry will make us better writers.

I also believe that poetry provides a kind of antidote for the fast-moving, increasingly distracted culture that we all live in. Poetry asks us to slow down. It asks us to pay attention. It asks us to notice. My hope is that our shared exploration of poetry will provide of all of us with a bit of space to see our lives and our world anew and to honor the small and specific stories that shape our lives.

Texts

You will find all reading for the unit in one of two places:

1. In our Course Reader, I have collected poems and writing about poetry, including excerpts from the wonderful book, *How a Poem Moves* by Adam Sol. Most of the poets we'll read in this reader are Americans from the 20th and 21st centuries, but I have included some poets who wrote in Spanish, one who wrote in Turkish, and the person considered the greatest poet right now in the Arab world, Adonis.
2. We will read from the anthology *American Journal: Fifty Poems for Our Time*, edited by Tracy K. Smith, a recent U.S. Poet Laureate. All of the poems in this collection are contemporary, written by some of the most important voices making poetry today.

Assignments

Creative Writing comprises 15% of your total grade for Free Minds. During our unit, you will only be working on Creative Writing. All assignments will be turned in to me, Vivé, and not to Laurie.

You will have a reading assignment and a writing assignment due each class session. It is important that you pay attention to the syllabus and get all writing in on time. You will be receiving feedback on your writing and working toward a final assignment, a Poetry Collection of three poem revisions, due on April 2. We will finish the unit with a class reading, hearing one final poem from each student in the room. This is a celebratory and powerful event, and all faculty are invited to join us.

Half of your grade for Creative Writing is comprised of turning in nightly writing assignments over the eight class periods. The other half is based on the quality of your Poetry Collection, including points for participating in our final reading.

The late assignment policy in this unit mirrors that for your Response Papers—I will only accept late work one class period after it is due, and then for 50% credit. Because we are building on previous work during each class, it's important that you keep on top of the assignments. If you are not in class, you are still expected to turn in your work electronically to me or Amelia.

Creative Writing Class 1: Poetry: Getting Started

We will begin the creative writing unit with a series of questions: How does a story become a poem? Is a piece of writing a poem simply because of the line breaks? Or is there another thing that makes something called a poem instead of, say, an essay?

Emily Dickinson is quoted as saying: "If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry." Do we want to hold it to the same standards?

In the poetry unit, we'll play with these questions, looking at a number of poems to determine what holds them together as a genre and considering the act of writing them. Today we'll talk about poems by exploring some good ones, and we'll consider what poet Ted Kooser calls "the poet's job description."

Read:

Course Reader

Adam Sol, from *How a Poem Moves*, "Introduction"

Elizabeth Alexander, "Ars Poetica #100: I Believe"

Billy Collins, "Introduction to Poetry"

Robert Hayden, "Those Winter Sundays"

Marie Howe, "What the Living Do"

Miller Williams, "Let Me Tell You"

William Carlos Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow"

American Journal

Introduction: This Is Why (3)

Aracelis Girmay, "Second Estrangement" (9)

Write:

As we enter the poetry unit, we will write a bit of reflective prose. In one to two paragraphs, please tell me about your experience of poetry. Do you love it? Hate it? Are you scared of it? Do you have a favorite poem?

Then, after reading the poems assigned for tonight's class, choose one poem that you found particularly striking. In one to two paragraphs, tell me what you liked about the poem, why it resonates for you, and what questions you are left with after reading it. You don't have to understand everything in a poem to love or be moved by it. Let your curiosity lead you.

Monday, March 2

Creative Writing Class 2: Odes: Songs of Praise

An ode, simply put, is a poem of celebration—of a person, a place, a thing, or an idea. There are some very formal "rules" for odes, drawn from the Ancient Greeks. But those rules aren't important to our theme for today. We are interested in how poetry can be a means of noticing, of honoring the small details of our world, and turning our attention to what is beautiful and noteworthy instead of what is going wrong.

For today, we will read a series of celebratory poems. Note how many of them, especially those by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda and the contemporary poet Ross Gay, focus on minor and everyday things.

For our craft focus, I want you to pay attention to image and detail. In poetry, we want to avoid abstraction—ideas separated from the concrete like "liberty" and "harmony." We want to root our poems in image, painting a vivid picture for the reader. Often, there will be a great deal of emotion in these poems, but the poems don't talk about emotion. They create emotion by precisely describing something to which we have an emotional reaction. Look for the images in these poems, how they use the five senses, how they make an idea come to life with specific details.

Read:

Course Reader

- Adam Sol, from *How a Poem Moves*, "How a Poem Invites Us to Praise"

- Lucille Clifton, “Homage to My Hips”
- Ross Gay, “Ode to Buttoning and Unbuttoning My Shirt,” “Ode to Sleeping in My Clothes,” “Ode to Drinking Water from My Hands”
- Li-Young Lee, “From Blossoms”
- Pablo Neruda, “Ode to My Socks,” “Ode to an Onion,” “Ode to Tomatoes” (Spanish versions included for those who speak Spanish)
- Tracy K. Smith, “Garden of Eden”
- Adam Zagajewski, “Try to Praise the Mutilated World”

Write:

For your writing assignment today, write an ode or praise song. Please follow the lead of either Ross Gay or Pablo Neruda, meaning your ode should be to something simple and regular, rather than something grand and spectacular. Write an ode to a favorite food, or to a regular activity that you don’t usually think about. You might write an ode to the #20 bus, or a praise song to umbrellas.

Look around your world. What needs celebrating?

Your poem should be at least 10 lines. It should not rhyme. It should include as many specific details and images as possible.

Thursday, March 5

Creative Writing Class 3: Poems About Place

We are shaped by the places we know. So it’s no surprise that poets often write about place, or that the physical environment enters our poems, whether it’s an interior or exterior landscape, real or imagined. For today we will read poems that use place to tell stories. Then we will write about our own places, either those in memory or those around us right now.

For our craft focus today, we will look at the structure of poems, how a poet breaks a piece of writing into lines and stanzas. (A stanza is like a paragraph in a poem. It comes from the Italian word “stanzas,” meaning “room,” and you can think of stanzas as the rooms a reader walks through in a poem.) Pay attention to whether the lines in the poem are short or long. Is the poem broken into several stanzas or just one? What is the impact of these choices on your experience of reading the poem? On the topic or meaning of the poem itself?

Read:

Course Reader

Langston Hughes, “Harlem” and “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”

Carolyn Forché, “Photograph of My Room”

Joy Harjo, “Walk”

Adam Sol, from *How a Poem Moves*, “How a Poem Transforms a Stroll into a Ceremony”

James Wright, “Lying in a Hammock on William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota”

William Butler Yeats, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”

American Journal

Oliver De La Paz, "In Defense of Small Towns" (10)

Terrance Hayes, "At Pegasus" (100)

Charles Wright, "Charlottesville Nocturne" (45)

Write:

For today you will write a poem about a place, using one of the three prompts below. Your poem should be at least 12 lines, not rhyme, and have a title. Aim to make it filled with image and detail. Take us to the place with you.

Choose one of these prompts:

- Using Carolyn Forché's "Photograph of My Room," write a descriptive poem about a room in your home or your life. Think about the objects, memories, smells, and colors that make it a specific place.
- Take a walk, as Joy Harjo did in her poem, "Walk." Make the walk come alive by writing about what you see and experience on the way.
- Take out a blank piece of paper and draw a map of the place where you grew up, the streets and buildings, landmarks and empty places. Let that map guide you to a poem about one of the places you drew. Include the map when you turn in the poem.

Monday, March 9

Creative Writing Class 4: Poems as Self Portrait

Poets today often plumb their personal experience to find material for poems. This, however, doesn't mean that the poems about the self are simply therapeutic. We relate to each other through personal experience, and the best poems resonate for us because what they are revealing is relevant not just for the poet, but for the reader too. Look for that familiarity in the poems you read for tonight.

For our craft focus, we'll talk about titles and openings, how we invite a reader into a poem. As you read the poems in today's assignment, pay attention to how they open, what decisions the poet makes in the first one to three lines of the poem that help grab the reader's attention. Think about how a title makes you want to read a poem (or not). Perhaps begin your reading by scanning down the list of poems below and seeing which one interests you the most, just by its title. Start there.

Read:

Course Reader

- Richard Blanco, "América"
- Lucille Clifton, "Won't You Celebrate with Me"
- Nazim Hikmet, "Autobiography"
- Larry Levis, "The Poet at Seventeen"
- Sharon Olds, "I Go Back to May 1937"
- Gary Soto, "Oranges"

American Journal

- Cathy Park Hong, “Who’s Who” (53)
- Donika Kelly, “Fourth Grade Autobiography” (61)
- Erika L. Sánchez, “The Poet at Fifteen” (39)
- Dean Young, “Romanticism 101” (105)

Write:

Notice the way the poets we read for today bring stories of their own lives into their poems, and the way they strive to be universal while doing so. When we write about ourselves, we explore who we are. When we write about ourselves, we also give voice to our communities and worlds.

For today, write a poem based on Nazim Hikmet’s poem “Autobiography.” Title your poem “Autobiography” and make sure that, like Hikmet, you include names and places, and very specific, concrete details. Try to mix up the timeline as Hikmet does, focusing on what is powerful and important. (You may want to begin by making a list or timeline to help you.) And remember, each of our lives is far larger than what can be contained in a single poem. Writing an autobiography requires that you *choose* your details with care. Learning to choose the right details or image or metaphor is key to every poem you write.

Thursday, March 12

Creative Writing Class 5: Ekphrasis: Writing About Art

Since the Free Minds curriculum includes art history, we have a great opportunity to look at where art and poetry intersect. Poems that respond to works of art (visual art, but also music and monuments) are called *ekphrastic*. The word comes from the Greek “ek” and “phrasis,” “out” and “speak” respectively. We can think of ekphrastic poetry as “speaking from or out of” another object. Ekphrastic poetry has a long history, going back thousands of years. You may want to think about what pieces of art inspire you to write about them when you visit the Blanton Museum in April.

For our craft focus, we’ll look at how poets approach pieces of art. Some poets address the work of art itself, like being in conversation with it. Some use the poem to describe the work of art, while others describe what’s not happening in the work of art. Some use the artwork as a means of leaping into personal story or response. Pay attention to how each poet “speaks from” the art in their ekphrastic poem.

Read:

Course Reader

- W.H. Auden, “Musée de Beaux Arts” and William Carlos Williams, “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus,” both in response to Pieter Bruegel’s “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus”
- Sandra Cisneros, “My Wicked Wicked Ways,” in response to a personal photograph
- Kate Daniels, “War Photograph,” in response to Vietnam War photograph by Nick Ut
- Laurie Ann Guerrero, “Last Meal: Breakfast Tacos, San Antonio, Tejas,” in response to “Breakfast Tacos” by Chuck Ramirez
- Yusef Komunyakaa, “Facing It,” in response to the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC

American Journal

- Mary Szybist, “Girls Overhead While Assembling a Puzzle” (25)
- Steve Scafidi, “For the Last American Buffalo” (107)

Write:

Find an image you love. Maybe it’s something that Janis shared with you in the Art History unit this year. Maybe it’s a print you have on your wall or something made by a family member or friend. You can consider paintings, photographs, sculptures, any piece of art.

Now, write a poem of response. Maybe you want to do that by writing very descriptively about the work. Maybe you want to write a story that connects to it instead. Maybe the art elicits an experience from your own life – write it! Maybe you have something you want to say to the artist.

We’ll spend time looking at different ways to write ekphrastic poems. To begin with, follow your instincts. Let the art inspire you. And please include a copy of the inspirational art with your poem.

Monday, March 16

Enjoy your spring break!

Thursday, March 19

Enjoy your spring break!

Monday, March 23

Creative Writing Class 6: Poems About Family

Few things have as much resonance in our lives as family, which is why family is such a common theme in poetry. Our parents, children, siblings, grandparents, and ancestors shape us in good ways and bad, opening us up or shutting us down. Today’s selections contain a little of both sides—family as struggle, family as balm.

Our craft focus today is on the musicality of poetry. Remember, poetry originated in song, and it is still the literary genre that comes closest to song. Pay attention to the ways poets use rhythm and rhyme. (“My Papa’s Waltz” is a great example.) Notice the specific word choices of the poets. Look for the following poetry techniques:

- Alliteration: using the same letter or consonant sound in adjacent or close words
- Assonance: repetition of a vowel sound in adjacent or close words
- Repetition: repeating words or phrases for meaning or music. Repetition plays a large role in Natalie Diaz’s “My Brother at 3AM”

These and other techniques are what separate poetry from prose, regardless of the line breaks. Really listen the poems you read for today. Hear them aloud. Find their music.

Read:

Course Reader

- Elizabeth Alexander, "Race"
- Yusef Komunyakaa, "My Father's Love Letters"
- Philip Levine, "You Can Have It" and "What Work Is"
- Theodore Roethke, "My Papa's Waltz"

American Journal

- Tina Chang, "Story of Girls" (59)
- Natalie Diaz, "My Brother at 3am" (42)
- Vievee Francis, "Sugar and Brine: Ella's Understanding" (16)
- Patrick Phillips, "Mercy" (96)
- Kevin Young, "Crowning" (86)

Write:

Think of a family member you want to write about, and then think of a *specific moment or* experience with that family member. Now write a poem about it. Don't try to tell us everything about that person or your relationship with him or her. Instead, let us see that person through one moment, one time when you interacted, one day or hour or minute.

The key is to be specific, to anchor your poem in concrete details. Once again, skip the rhyming and go for images instead. Bring in the five senses. Pay attention to the words you choose. Make your poem at least 10 lines. Give it a great title and focus on those opening lines.

Thursday, March 26

Creative Writing Class 7: The World at Large: Poetry About Conflict and Justice

*"In the dark times
Will there also be singing?
Yes, there will also be singing.
About the dark times."
— Bertolt Brecht*

As Tracy K. Smith, former US Poet Laureate and editor of the anthology, *American Journal*, said recently in the New York Times, for much of the 20th century, American poets rarely wrote poems that could be considered "political." American poetry leaned toward the personal and lyrical, even while poets in other parts of the world were writing with an eye toward social justice and change. This started to shift after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, when many people turned to poetry to find comfort or to vent their feelings. Says Smith:

In the intervening years, political poetry, even here in America, has done much more than vent. It has become a means of owning up to the complexity of our problems, of accepting the likelihood that even we the righteous might be implicated by or complicit in some facet of the very wrongs we decry. Poems willing to enter into this fraught space don't merely stand on the bank calling out instructions on how or what to believe; they take us by the arm and walk us into the lake, wetting us with the muddied and the muddled, and sometimes even the holy. ("Politics and Poetry," *New York Times*, 12/10/18)

For today, we will look at how some poets—most of them contemporary, with the exception of the great Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai—create poetry that is a dialogue with the broader world. History, war, race, and AIDS are among the topics we will explore in verse.

For our craft focus today we will pull together all of the things we've talked about – image and concrete detail, line and structure, titles and openings, and musicality, and see how these elements of craft are at play in the poems.

Read:

Course Reader

Yehuda Amichai, "The Diameter of the Bomb"

Gwendolyn Brooks, "We Real Cool"

Joan Larkin, "Inventory"

Amanda Johnston, "Facing US"

American Journal

Joy Harjo, "No" (62)

Major Jackson, "Mighty Pawns" (19)

Ilya Kaminsky, "We Lived Happily During the War" (67)

Lia Purpura, "Proximities" (57)

Layli Long Soldier, "38" (73)

Danez Smith, "[from] summer, somewhere" (21)

Write:

One of the things that makes it difficult to write about political topics or sweeping things like war is that we may have a lot of emotion connected to it. And all that emotion can come at us as a rant, or a lecture, or an outpouring. And those often leave the reader cold.

For this assignment, you are going to be guided by the poets you read for the day. Think about an issue that is important to you, something you care about. It may be something that affects you directly, or something more distant but no less important, like border separation. Sit with that topic for a bit, then select one of the prompts below to guide you.

- In "Inventory," Joan Larkin brings the AIDS crisis to life—and to light—by painting an image of those who were affected by it. Write a poem that uses the structure Larkin used, repeating stanzas that begin with the words, "One who." Illuminate your issue by giving us the "ones who" are impacted by it. Be specific.

- Joy Harjo’s poem “No” is largely a series of “yeses” that give voice to an individual’s experience. Construct a poem about a larger issue in the world that relies on a series of yes and no statements, as Harjo has done.
- Begin your poem with the words, “If I told you...” as Major Jackson does in “Mighty Pawns.” Then tell us the story of someone else, someone whose life exemplifies a story you believe deserves to be told.

Monday, March 30

Creative Writing Class 8: Poems About Endings

As we wrap up the Creative Writing unit, we’ll look at how poems can be used to honor the dead and mark significant endings. Though there are many ways to write about death and loss, the most common type of poem to do this is an elegy (not to be confused with a eulogy). The two words are broken down below:

- Elegy – mournful song or poem, especially a lament for the dead – from the 16th century, via French and Latin from Greek, *elegeia*, from *elegos*, lament sung to flute accompaniment
- Eulogy – speech in praise of a person or thing, especially in honor of a deceased person – from the 16th century, Latin, *eulogium*, short saying or inscription, from Greek, *eulogia*, praise (*eu* – well + *logia* –speaking → speaking well of)

We are also coming to the end of our unit, so we are shifting from writing new work to revising existing work. Revision is also our craft focus for today. Because no good writing—poetry or otherwise—is good without revision. To revise is to see-again. Revision isn’t just changing a word or two here or there. It’s stepping back from a piece and seeing it freshly. It’s imaging it in its final form. And then it’s working to get it there.

Read:

Course Reader

- Adonis, “Song”
- Joy Harjo, “Perhaps the World Ends Here”

American Journal

- Jericho Brown, “N’em” (12)
- Mark Doty, “Apparition” (98)
- Ada Limón, “Downhearted” (46)
- Natasha Trethewey, “Elegy” (83)

Write:

Your assignment to complete the unit comes in two parts. You will receive a handout about this assignment, but briefly:

1. You will revise three of the six poems you wrote for this unit, integrating the elements of craft we’ve been discussing across the unit. Those three poems, with a brief introduction, will comprise your Poetry Collection. It is due Thursday, April 2.

2. We will give a class reading on Thursday, April 2. This is an important opportunity to hear each other's work, to celebrate each other's voices, and to gather as a community. You will select one poem from your collection to read on Thursday.

For tonight, look over the six poems you have written for this unit, and identify the three that you are most interested in revising for your final project. Begin revisions on at least two of those three poems, using my comments and the discoveries we have made about craft and poetry. Bring all three poems to class, including the revisions. We will work on them together.

Thursday, April 2

Creative Writing Class 9: Sharing Our Poems

Congratulations! You've spent more than a month exploring poetry as both reader and writer. Tonight we will celebrate all of that work with a class presentation, sharing our poems with each other and honoring each other's words and stories. We will discuss specifics together in class.

Due: Poetry Collection. See assignment sheet.

Monday, April 6

Literature Unit with Dr. Patricia García

Unit Overview 2: Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*

The second work we will read in our literature unit is Sandra Cisneros' novel *The House on Mango Street*. Cisneros is a Mexican-American author originally from Chicago but a San Antonio resident for many years. *The House on Mango Street* examines life in an inner city or *barrio* neighborhood in Chicago as seen through the eyes of the young protagonist, Esperanza. Esperanza tells the stories of those around her, particularly the women, and how they live their lives in the face of poverty, racism, and sexism. As a young girl, how will Esperanza live and tell her own story? How might telling stories of people who live on Mango Street help change the lives of others?

Literature Class 6: Where We Live

Background: Sandra Cisneros (American, 1954) published *The House on Mango Street* in 1984, a time when many Mexican American and Latina women writers begin publishing as a result of and in response to the Chicano political and literary movement of the 1960's and 70's. While this earlier movement had given voice to the Chicano/a community, many of its most vocal members were male. Writers such as Cisneros began to examine ethnic identity in terms of gender. In other words, how does the experience of being Mexican American in the U.S. differ for men and women? This is an important question in the novel that also addresses more universal questions of gender and class. The novel is written in a child's voice and told in vignettes: short passages that form the chapters. The chapters don't present a straight narrative but rather glimpses into Esperanza's life on Mango Street. It does tell a story, so look at how Esperanza responds and reacts to the world around her. We are witnessing her growing up. Finally, Esperanza is not Cisneros, but rather a character that speaks from Cisneros' own experience and here experiences with others. Esperanza is a young girl, but she makes some very grown-up observations about the world.

Read: *The House on Mango Street*, from “The House on Mango Street” through “Darius and the Clouds.”

Response Paper Prompt

Option 1: How would you describe Esperanza? How does she describe herself? What do other characters say about her? In answering these questions, consider how a character is developed in a story through descriptions and actions. Support your answers with direct references to the text.

Option 2: How does Esperanza describe her dream house, and how does this compare to the house where she lives? What does her dream house tell us about the American dream, and what does her reality reveal about the promise and limitations of the American dream? Support your answers with direct references to the text.

Thursday, April 9

Literature Class 7: The Lives of Women

Background: Esperanza spends time with many girls and women who are older than her such as Marin, Alicia, Ruthie, and Rafaela. What’s their story? What do their experiences teach Esperanza about the lives of women on Mango Street? What sort of life does Esperanza want for herself? A re-occurring motif in the novel is fairy tales. For example, how might “The Family of Little Feet” remind us of Cinderella, or Rafaela of Rapunzel? What lessons do fairy tales teach women about the world, especially how to handle difficult situations? Does the novel offer us any alternatives to these lessons, perhaps to challenge the fairy tale idea?

Read: *The House on Mango Street*, from “And some more” through “Rafaela who drinks coconut and papaya juice on Tuesday”

Discussion Question: In addition to memorable characters, Cisneros also creates beautiful and powerful symbols in the book, such as the house on Mango Street itself. It’s a place that Esperanza rejects, and yet it becomes a part of who she is. Choose another symbol from the novel and consider its meaning in the novel. Some possible symbols would be shoes (shoes show up a lot in the novel!), the music box in “Gil’s Furniture,” a red balloon, or the four trees.

Monday, April 13

Literature Class 8: From a House to a Home

Background: The storyline about Sally is one of the most powerful in the novel. Look especially at her first observations about Sally and how she comes to learn more about her life. Esperanza is drawn to Sally because, like her, she is an outsider. How would you compare Sally to the other women in the novel? How does Esperanza’s relationship with Sally change Esperanza? By the novel’s conclusion, Esperanza has moved from observation to action. What has living on Mango Street taught her about her world and how she can act to change it? What does she learn about the power of stories?

Read: *The House on Mango Street*, from “Sally” to end of the novel

Response Paper Prompt:

Option 1: Esperanza tries to save Sally numerous times. Choose one attempt and discuss why Esperanza's plan fails to work. What factors in her plan are within Esperanza's control, and what things can she not control? What is Esperanza's response to this failure? Support your answer with at least one direct reference to the text.

Option 2: Look back to the opening chapter of the novel. How is it similar to the ending? How has Esperanza changed? Support your answer with at least two quotes (one from the opening and one from the end.)

Thursday, April 16

Literature Class 9: Writing Esperanza's Story

Background: Tonight you'll be reading two essays by Cisneros, the introduction to the novel and the essay "Hydra House" from her recent collection of essays entitled *A House of My Own*. In these essays, she will speak about how and why she wrote the novel, including the ways in which she worked in her own life and the life of others to create Esperanza's story. Pay attention to how Cisneros sees herself as a writer, both when she wrote the essay and now looking back to this time in her life. How did telling stories help save Cisneros, and how does she see her stories helping others?

Read:

- The "Introduction" to *The House on Mango Street*
- "Hydra House," an essay by Sandra Cisneros (Course packet)

Discussion question: Based on these two essays, what aspects of Esperanza are drawn from Cisneros' own life? What other characters in the novel do you think also reflect Cisneros' experiences? Why?

Monday, April 20

Writing Class 10: Reflection

"I think all writing is a question and we're walking towards the answer. You don't know the question until you get the answer, and you don't get the answer till you get to the end."

—Sandra Cisneros, interview with *The Writer* magazine

Focus: In the course of our studies, you've grown as a writer and a thinker. Now, it's time to reflect. In this class, we will discuss your final portfolio assignment as a means of reflecting upon how far you have come.

Write: Set a timer for 7 minutes and free write in response to your portfolio essay prompt: How have you grown as a thinker, reader, or writer during Free Minds? Then choose one piece of writing that you plan to include in your portfolio. Re-Read this piece, set your timer for 5 minutes and write in response

to this piece of your own. You might use the template, “I used to _____, but now I _____” to reflect on how your reading, writing, or thinking has changed.

Bring: Final portfolio assignment sheet, a selection of 4-6 pieces of your Free Minds writing (including at least one formal paper) that you are considering for inclusion in your portfolio.

Thursday, April 23

Art History Class 8: Visit to the Blanton Art Museum

Tonight we will be forgoing the classroom and heading to the Blanton Art Museum. Stay tuned for details.

Monday, April 27

Art History Class 9: Seeing through Photographs with Lorna Simpson

Lorna Simpson is an African-American photographer and multimedia artist who is best known for her photo-collages and photo-text installations. She was one of a group of artists who became well known in the 1980s for exploring themes related to identity politics in their work. Identity politics focuses on the lives and experiences of those who are often marginalized in society.

Read: Margo Jefferson, “Introduction to Lorna Simpson,” from *Vision & Justice*, a special issue of *Aperture* guest edited by Sarah Lewis (Summer 2016). (course reader)

Watch: “Artist Lorna Simpson, part 1: photographer, printmaker” <https://tinyurl.com/yx4nouee>

Response Paper Prompt: Jefferson describes Lorna Simpson as an artist who is always searching for new ways/techniques to make viewers of her work “uncertain.” For your response paper, choose one of the four collage/drawings by Simpson included in Jefferson’s article. Describe how Simpson deliberately creates uncertainty in the image. You might think about the images/texts/media she has chosen to include, where and how they are arranged, and how she uses color. Be sure to include specific details in your response.

Thursday, April 30

Philosophy Unit with Dr. Matthew Daude Laurents

Unit Overview: Spring Semester: Plato’s *Republic* Rides Again

This spring semester, we will continue our reading of Plato’s *Republic*. In the fall, we made our way through books I through VI, tracing Plato’s thought experiment: To construct an ideal city as a means of discovering the true nature of justice and the identification of justice. It turns out that justice is the harmony produced when each part of the city (or the soul) is doing its own proper work according to its true nature.

To prepare for the rest of our journey, think back on the themes of our discussions about the first books and review your notes. It might be helpful for you to review the “Read me first” handout from fall, but let me highlight two important principles: (1) Breathe normally, and (2) read all the words in order before you let yourself get bogged down with details.

Remember that I’m your guide (!), so you don’t have to find your way in the dark totally on your own. Our class discussion will be about way-finding in this complex, murky text, so don’t worry too much if you don’t feel confident that you know what’s going on. You will, but it’s important to breathe so you don’t get so frustrated that you close the book.

As was our practice last fall, I’ve given you a reading assignment for each philosophy class, and with that assignment you have two resources. I have indicated passages that will serve as the major theme for our class discussion, and I’ve given you some questions to help you with the reading. Keep these questions in mind as you read the words (in order).

One final thought as we prepare for another dive into Plato: Reading a text is a conversation, and what you get out of any conversation is closely related to what you bring to the table. This implies that you — the real you, with your own perspectives and experiences — need to stay engaged with Plato and what he says, but you also need to try to understand *him* in what he is saying to *you*. Hearing is pretty easy; listening is more challenging, and understanding takes work. This is why, in academic conversations of all kinds, we tend to be focused a lot *on the text*: This is our way of conversing with people who can’t just answer our questions, because, for instance, they’re dead. Their words, the words *they* chose to reveal their ideas to *us* — those words are all we have, but we can’t sit passively and let the words wash over us, like lying on the couch and listening to Pink Floyd. We have to be *active partners* in the conversation, sensitive to the fact that we are engaging another mind with something to say. The opposite of letting Plato wash over you passively is seeing only yourself reflected back, like a big Plato-mirror. Here’s a silly example: If I told you that Book VI of the *Republic* is really about the best way to cook nutritious meals, you’d probably wonder which Book VI I’d been reading, right? Going back again and again to the *words* in the text is what keeps us honest about understanding, rather than just looking in a mirror!

That’s plenty of advice for now. Get busy with book VII — Plato still has some surprises in store, I’ll bet. Happy philosophizing!

Philosophy Class 6: What Can a Philosopher know? Continued . . .

Read: *Republic*, Book VII. Concentrate on 514a-519e and 535a-536d

Discussion Questions

What is an **allegory**? Why is the story of the Cave called an allegory? What is Socrates trying to tell us about the proper education of the philosopher? Explain by interpreting the elements of the story (e.g., the “prisoners,” the shadows, the sun, etc.)

Think: Is the city ruled by philosophers *complete*? (As in, completely complete? We’ve heard this before!)

Monday, May 4

Philosophy Class 7: How bad can things get?

Read: *Republic*, Book VIII. Concentrate on 544d-546c and 561a-b

Response Paper Prompt:

Socrates claims that the *kallipolis* must inevitably decline. Why must the ideal city decline? Into what will the *kallipolis* degenerate? How does Socrates use the Tripartite Soul model to explain this degeneration? (Hint: big letters = small letters!)

Think: What is **democracy**, according to Socrates? Where does democracy fall in the degeneration of the ideal city? Why? (Hint: What are the five types of “rule” or constitutions by which people might govern themselves?)

Thursday, May 7

Philosophy Class 8: Are you happy now, Thrasymachus?

Read: *Republic*, Book IX. Concentrate on 580a-c and 583b-588b

Discussion Questions: Each of the five types of self-rule corresponds to a type of *ruler*. Which type of ruler has the best life? Which type has the worst life? What makes the difference in the different lives of the types of rulers?

More challenging:

How does Socrates answer Thrasymachus’s key claim about justice and power? Why does he bring up the idea of *pleasure*? What are the types of pleasures that correspond to the types of ruler? What are examples of different types of pleasures? Is a particular sort of pleasure superior to the others? Why?

Monday, May 11

Philosophy Class 9: Impersonating Poetry: imitator, maker, or user?

Read: *Republic*, Book X. Concentrate on 595a-608b

Response Paper Prompt:

We’ve almost made it to the end of the *Republic*! Now, let’s pretend: You are Socrates, and I’ll be Thrasymachus. Write a *one-page* letter to me in which you explain your main argument about why my concept of justice as “the advantage of the stronger” is wrong.

Focus narrowly. Be brief. Breathe normally.

Discussion Questions

To us, book X might seem anticlimactic. Instead of a Big Finish, Plato seems (to us) to use book X

quibbling about poetry and education and how to portray human beings. But beneath what looks like quibbling, Plato poses the most controversial challenge to the Athenian establishment in the whole *Republic*: **the place of poetry in education**. You see, every educated Greek would have learned to read and write by *reading Homer*, and, along with learning the letters and vocabulary and grammar and style, they would have learned “life lessons”—like, what it is to be courageous, what it means to love your city, what it means to go to war—and most importantly, what it means to have a good (virtuous = excellent) life. And that’s right where Plato zeroes in: **Do poets write Truth?**

After all, if we’re going to *learn* virtues from a poet — if we’re going to *learn* how to live a good life — that poet had better be telling us the truth. *But* can poetry written by a poet tell the truth? In what way? What truth? Do poets have to *know* what they’re talking about? Could a poet teach you medicine without being a physician *first*? Could a poet teach you about virtue without *first* being a virtuous hero?

That is why people found Plato provocative — even shocking.

Think: Why does Plato leave the door open to the possibility that poetry might be rehabilitated (607b-608b)?

The Last Word: Er

Why does Socrates introduce Er at the end of the *Republic*? Who is Er? What is Er’s story? How does the story of Er complete the argument that Socrates makes against Thrasymachus?

The End

We made it! You’ve just finished reading *all* of one of the most influential books in Western history!

Welcome to the club.

Thursday, May 14

Class wrap up, sharing, and celebration

On our last class around the table, you will hand in your portfolio assignment, and prepare for one-on-one faculty conferences; we’ll do some final graduation preparations as well, and celebrate and honor our work together.

Final portfolio and portfolio essay are due tonight.

Monday, May 18

One-on-one Portfolio Conferences

Graduation is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, May 26.