

Reading Literature: Imagining Home

Professor M. Soledad Caballero

Contact Information: Oddfellows 215

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Office hours: MW: 4:45-6:00

Tuesdays and Thursdays: 11-12:00 noon

Tuesdays: 3-4:30

Required Texts:

The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, Junot Diaz

The House on Mango Street, Sandra Cisneros

The Mixquiahuala Letters, Ana Castillo

Zoot Suit and Other Plays, Luis Valdez

We Came All the Way from Cuba So You Could Dress Like This? Stories, Achy Obejas

Poetry and other materials, on Sakai

Objectives:

Reading literature is the gateway course for English classes. We will develop our critical thinking and writing skills and most importantly the skills to read self-consciously. At its core this is a reading class, not for proficiency, this you know how to do. We will read for meaning, form, style, content, genre – we will engage the material and its linguistic play and explore the contradictions, the marvels, and the frustrations of coming to a text and asking not what it says but what it means. The thematic structure of this class circulates around the ideas of individual identity in relation to family identity in the face of questions of nationality, geography, language, and sexual, racial, and gender identity.

Requirements:

Two essays (5 pages) = 50% of final grade

Explication essays (2-3 pages): Two of four = 25% of final grade

Take Home Final: 15% of final grade

Class Participation (includes attending classes, group work, written homework, in-class writing, etc.): 10% of final grade

Sakai: Get comfortable with it. Learn to love it, and learn to use it. All reading material not found books will be on Sakai. You will deliver your essays, out of class writing, etc. via Sakai. Essay topics will be posted here as well. All relevant information, discussion questions, etc. will be on Sakai. And you'll receive graded essays this way too. If you've got questions, ask, and get familiar with Murray Hall, and with the help desk, ext. 2755. No excuses for not being able to do this, etc.

Please be aware that all writing that is not done in class must be typed, double-spaced with 1" inch margins and in an appropriate font (Times New Roman in 12 point is usually standard), paginated, dated, and with your name at top of the first page. Do not add any unnecessary spaces between paragraphs or before the first line of your essay. Use MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation format when necessary.

Students are encouraged to avail themselves of the tutors in the Learning Commons as they begin and work through assignments.

Participation:

Class participation is central to the success of your experience in this class. This means that you have carefully read each assignment, have thought about it in the context of our other classes and conversations, are ready with questions and concerns that you have, and are energized and excited about our class time. You may find the material difficult to follow and hard to read, and for this reason, class discussion is crucial. This is not a time to be “timid” or “shy;” remember that a well-asked and well thought out question is as valuable in a discussion as a declarative statement. Keep in mind, however, that quantity of comments and questions does not trump quality. Talk often and insightfully. Not doing so will detrimentally affect your grade.

A participation is marked by its active nature, its consistency, and its quality. An **A** participant doesn't wait to respond to questions that the instructor poses but initiates discussion by coming prepared with questions, ideas, observations about the reading assigned that day. This participant will also be consistently engaged in class discussion, always letting me know that she/he has engaged the reading thoroughly and thoughtfully. Finally an **A** participant will not try to substitute quantity of participation for quality (being consistent is not the same thing as dominating a discussion). To earn the highest grade for your participation, you will want to make it possible for others to participate productively too (this is not a competition); thus, habits such as interrupting others and taking up too much conversational space will not enhance your grade. It will also do you no good to participate if you haven't done the reading. I expect participation to be firmly grounded in careful and thoughtful reading. As the **A** reader reads, she or he prepares to participate in a class discussion with other readers.

A **B** participant is less consistent than an **A** in initiating discussion but is active in responding to questions or problems posed by the professor and other students. To get a **B** in participation, you will need to be in class and talk regularly—more, certainly, than once during a class session once a week or so. Regular means regular. This level of class participation will also communicate clearly to me that you have done all the reading for the day and that you have done it thoughtfully. This level will also include productive discussion habits, such as engaging the ideas of others, not dominating, listening carefully, etc.

A **C** grade for participation means that you have contributed in an average way to the discussion. Your contributions have been less frequent than those of the **B** participant or have let me know that you are not always keeping up with the reading or have, in some way, interfered with good discussion—for instance, a “dominator” would get credit for participating often but would get knocked down to a **C** for taking over and not engaging others in discussion. In short, you have not been silent or absent or altogether uninvolved, but your involvement did not work consistently to make the class a productive learning experience.

A **D** grade means that you were there physically most of the time and maybe even piped up three or four times during the semester but that's it. It's just the grade it should be—a minimal passing grade.

An **F** grade should need no explanation.

All work must be submitted to pass the course. Active, engaged class participation and attendance are expected. Four or more absences will result in automatic failure for the class. Remember that excused and unexcused absences are not distinguished. Late essays are not

accepted and will be knocked down one full letter grade for each day they are late, including weekend. Late explication essays are not accepted.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you do not bring your books, handouts, materials to class, you will be asked to leave and get them and then return to class. Too many of these incidents will detrimentally affect your final grade.

Other Information:

Students should schedule appointments during office hours. Students may contact Professor Caballero via email. Please allow 2 business days for email responses.

Students will conduct themselves in a responsible and respectable manner towards fellow students and professors.

Please turn off cell phones for class. If a cell phone rings, Professor Caballero will answer it.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is another word for stealing, that is, taking what is not yours and passing it off as your own. When you plagiarize you directly or indirectly use the ideas and/or language of another person or persons without acknowledgement and claim these words and ideas as your own. Not only is it serious and grounds for academic expulsion, it is also against the law. You are plagiarizing if you do any or all of the following, though please keep in mind that these are not the only ways to plagiarize: 1) Use others' words directly without proper citation and quotations, 2) Use others' ideas and wording so closely (paraphrasing) that you are essentially quoting them without proper acknowledgement, 3) re-use assignments not written for this class and pretend that they are written for this class, 4) Borrow, buy, steal, download (you get the idea) others' essays, ideas, words, language, etc. and pass them off as your own. I should say that I regularly visit on-line websites that sell college essays and that I belong to a large network of websites that assist me in finding stolen essays students have bought on line. Please see me at any time if you have citation and documentation questions.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination status that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation for their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Learning Commons at 332-2898. It is your responsibility to do this and inform your professors ahead of time, not after assignments, tests, exams, etc are due or in progress.

Calendar

The calendar is subject to change as the semester progresses.

Week 1

Monday, Sept. 5

First day of classes
“Bilingual Blues” and “Dedication,” Gustavo Perez Firmat

Wednesday, Sept. 7

“Interpretation” (essay on Sakai)

Week 2

Monday, Sept. 12

“Interpretation” continued

Wednesday, Sept. 14

Oxford English Dictionary and *The House on Mango Street*, 3-50

Week 3

Monday, Sept. 19

The House on Mango Street, pg 56-93

Wednesday, Sept. 21

The House on Mango Street, pg 94-110
(Explication Essay #1 Due on Sakai)

Week 4

Monday, Sept. 26

Zoot Suit pg 5-50

Wednesday, Sept. 28

Zoot Suit pg 51-83

Week 5

Monday, Oct. 3

Zoot Suit continued

Wednesday, Oct. 5

Zoot Suit and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*
pg 1-75 (5)

Page Essay #1 Due on Sakai)

Week 6

Monday, Oct. 10

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao pg77-165

Wednesday, Oct. 12

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao pg 166-232

Week 7

Monday, Oct. 17

Fall break, no class

Wednesday, Oct. 19

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao pg 233-299

Week 8

Monday, Oct. 24

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao pg 299-335

Wednesday, Oct. 26

Essay “Figurative Language” (Sakai)
(Explication Essay #2 Due on Sakai)

Week 9

Monday, Oct. 31

“Bilingual Blue” Firmat, “Uses for Spanish in Pittsburgh” Naca, “Speaking Spanish is Like,” “Speaking English is Like” Naca (all on Sakai)

Wednesday, Nov. 2

“To We Who Were Saved By the Stars” Lorna Dee Cervantes, “Snaps of Immigration” Victor

Hernandez Cruz, "My Native Costume" Martin Espada (all on Sakai)

Week 10

Monday, Nov. 7

"Sonrisas" "Bilingual Christmas" "The Grateful Minority" Pat Mora, "Puerto Rican Obiturary"

Pedro Pietri (all on Sakai)

Wednesday, Nov. 9

"Thanksgiving" Martin Espada (on Sakai)

Week 11

Monday, Nov. 14

The Mixquiahuala Letters pg17-58

Wednesday, Nov. 16

The Mixquiahuala Letters pg59-104

(Explication Essay #3 Due on Sakai)

Week 12

Monday, Nov. 21

The Mixquiahuala Letters pg104-138

Wednesday, Nov. 23

Thanksgiving break, no classes

Week 13

Monday, Nov. 28

"We came all the way from Cuba so you could dress like this?"

Wednesday, Nov. 30

"We came all the way from Cuba so you could dress like this?"

(5 page Essay #2 Due on Sakai)

Week 14

Monday, Dec. 5

"We came all the way from Cuba so you could dress like this?"

Wednesday, Dec. 7

We came all the way from Cuba so you could dress like this?"

(Explication Essay #4 Due on Sakai)

Week 15

Monday, Dec. 12

"La Letty" "Disco Gymnasium" "What is Bad"

"Attention Shoppers" "White Owned" "Mr. and

Mrs. White Guilt" "The Gift," Michele Serros (all

on sakai)

Wednesday, Dec. 14

Last Day of Classes

Exam Schedule:

Study Days: Thursday, Dec. 15 and Friday, Dec.

Exam Days: Saturday, Dec. 17 to Wednesday, Dec. 21

Final Take Home Exam due on Sakai: