

## **CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FICTION**

English 429C | UVic | Spring 2017 | CRN: 21321 | MR 1-2:20pm | MAC D283

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Syllabus online (PDF): <https://jentery.github.io/429c/429c.pdf>

Syllabus online (HTML): <https://jentery.github.io/429c/>

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course surveys American fiction from the 1980s to the present. It is intended to give you a broad understanding of some issues and styles at play during the period, with an emphasis on prominent authors and literary texts. While the course is not structured around a particular theme or special topic, we will often focus on the roles of home, family, and kinship in contemporary American fiction. How is home defined or described? Where is it located? How are families produced and experienced through stories? By whom, and from which perspectives? How are kinship networks constructed, and how do people relate within them? Throughout the term, we'll see how these questions surface variously across texts, and we'll discuss why they appear so important to American fiction from the 1980s forward.

## **OBJECTIVES**

By the conclusion of this course, you should:

- Purposefully read and analyze contemporary American fiction (1980s to the present) by attending to the following five dimensions of literature: narrative, power, language, history, and reception,
- Identify key passages, terms, and themes from a selection of contemporary American novels and short stories,
- Concisely communicate the relevance of social, cultural, and aesthetic issues common to contemporary American fiction, with an emphasis on issues of home, family, and kinship,
- Demonstrate an awareness of several strategies and genres that writers use to interpret contemporary American fiction, including techniques invested in analysis, context, and creativity, and
- Conduct writing workshops with your peers by circulating drafts of your work, commenting on work by others, and revising your drafts before submitting them for assessment.

These objectives will be evaluated through three writing assignments, three writing workshops, and a final exam.

## **ASSIGNED TEXTS**

*House on Mango Street* (1984), by Sandra Cisneros

*Beloved* (1987), by Toni Morrison

*Geek Love* (1989), by Katherine Dunn

*Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (excerpts) (1993), by Sherman Alexie

*Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006), by Alison Bechdel

*Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), by Junot Díaz

*Americanah* (2013), by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

With the exception of *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (excerpts of which will be circulated in class), required texts are available at the UVic Bookstore. I will reference the Bookstore's copies during class discussion, but feel free to choose whichever edition you prefer, in print or digital format.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

I am asking you to complete three writing assignments, participate in three writing workshops, and take one comprehensive exam. Details for each are below.

### **Writing Assignments (three, totaling 60% of your final mark)**

For the writing assignments, you:

- Must write about at least three different texts during the course of the term,
- Cannot write about the same text more than once,
- Can respond to the prompts in whatever order you prefer (e.g., Analysis then Creativity then Context, or Creativity then Context then Analysis),
- Must revise each piece before submitting it to me (the three writing workshops build this revision process into the course),
- Must submit your responses to me in print (thanks for your patience here), and
- Can respond to any prompt by focusing on any assigned text, well after we discussed the text in class or even before we've discussed it.

The three writing assignments are divided into three categories: Analysis, Context, and Creativity. The prompts for each assignment are below. For each category and assignment, you have three options to choose from. The pedagogical purpose of this approach is to encourage you to build on your own interests while also writing about literature across genres, strategies, and situations, without assuming that academic analysis is the only way to engage literature.

## **Analysis (20% of your final mark)**

This writing assignment emphasizes close reading, without much (if any) need to read beyond the novel or short story at hand. For it, you have three options. Please choose one.

### **1) Narrative:** What is significant about the text's narrative?

Write an academic argument in ~1000 words (MLA format) about how the narrative of an assigned text is constructed and why its construction is compelling or unique. As you write, consider describing the general characteristics of the text (e.g., plot, genre, characterization, setting, and style) but also interpreting one or two key passages in detail.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- What is the form of the text? How are pieces of the story stitched together?
- How is time structured? Is it chronological? Non-linear?
- How does the text flash back or flash forward?
- How does the text use footnotes, if at all?
- How is it focalized? Who presents the story? What do they remember, know, ignore, or forget? How do they travel from place to place or moment to moment?
- Are there ghosts? If so, then how do they communicate with the present?
- While reading, what must we assume or suspend?
- Does the narrative have a beginning, middle, and end? If so, then where are they? If not, then why?
- Is there resolution on the last page? To what effects on interpretation?

If you choose this option, then feel free to write ~1000 words about the overall form of the text and to also interpret a specific passage or two where the text's narrative structure clearly influences how the story unfolds. Since you're writing an academic argument, you should probably include a claim/thesis supported by evidence, which is then interpreted from multiple perspectives.

### **2) Power:** What is significant about how power operates in the text?

Write an academic argument in ~1000 words (MLA format) about how power operates within an assigned text and why this approach to power is compelling or unique. As you write, consider describing the general characteristics of the

text (e.g., plot, genre, characterization, setting, and style) but also interpreting one or two key passages in detail.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- Who has agency or mobility in the text? In what situations? In relations with whom?
- How do racism, patriarchy, colonialism, ableism, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, classism, weightism, and/or sexism operate in the text?
- What do characters assume about each other?
- What perspectives and positions are treated as the default or norm?
- Who gets to speak, to whom, and when?
- Who is considered an expert, and under what assumptions?
- How do characters switch codes or morph their behaviours across situations? How do they identify, and when?
- Who is the text's intended audience, and how does the text speak to them? To what effects on interpretation?

If you choose this option, then feel free to write ~1000 words about how power operates in the text and to also interpret a specific passage or two where power clearly influences how social issues unfold in the text. Since you're writing an academic argument, you should probably include a claim/thesis supported by evidence, which is then interpreted from multiple perspectives.

**3) Language:** What is significant about the use of language(s) in the text?

Write an academic argument in ~1000 words (MLA format) about the use of language(s) in an assigned text and why this use is compelling or unique. As you write, consider describing the general characteristics of the text (e.g., plot, genre, characterization, setting, and style) but also interpreting one or two key passages in detail.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- How would you describe the language of the text?
- Which metaphors and phrases are repeated throughout it?
- How do characters speak to each other? To themselves? How many languages do they use? How do they translate or switch across languages?
- If there's a narrator, then how would you describe their voice?
- Which languages does the text combine or juxtapose?
- When is the prose also poetic? Elliptical? Specific?

- When does the language convey information? When is it ambiguous?
- Does the text create its own language? Its own words? If so, then why?
- What is the social, cultural, or political function of language in the text?
- How does the text sound when you read it aloud?
- How is language embodied in the text?
- How does the language represent or perform history?
- Does the language correspond with your everyday life? What must you translate or look up? To what effects on interpretation?

If you choose this option, then feel free to write about the overall use of language(s) in the text and to also interpret a specific passage or two where language influences how communication unfolds in the text. Since you're writing an academic argument, you should probably include a claim/thesis supported by evidence, which is then interpreted from multiple perspectives.

### **Context (20% of your final mark)**

This writing assignment focuses on the contexts that shape interpretation. It requires some reading beyond the texts at hand. For it, you have three options. Please choose one.

**1) Intended Audience and Reception:** Who is the text's intended audience, and how was the text received across venues?

In ~750 words (MLA format), assess an assigned text's reception and also identify and describe its intended audience(s). As you write, consider the details that matter for audience and reception: date of publication, publisher, awards, and the author's publication history. Also consider various venues for reception: everything from the CBC and *New York Times* to Amazon and Goodreads to journal articles in the MLA International Bibliography. When identifying intended audiences, please be as specific as possible.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- When was the book published? By whom?
- Who did the original cover art? What was on the cover?
- Was it the author's first book? Last book? Somewhere in between? How similar is it to the author's other books?
- What awards did the book receive?
- How many editions now exist?

- Where was the book reviewed? Who reviewed it? Were the reviews positive? What did they focus on? What role did the author's reputation play in the reviews?
- How did reviews differ from one venue to the next? What do you make of these differences?
- How is the book rated by social cataloguing and commerce sites? What sort of comments do people leave about it?
- Is there any tension between "popular" reception and "critical" reception? If so, then why?
- How much scholarship has been written about the book? Where is the book popular? Who tends to identify with it?
- Does the book have a fan culture or subculture?
- How would you describe the book's intended audience? Why does this audience matter when reviewing the book?
- Did the book become something else, such as a movie or play? How well was the adaptation received? To what effects on interpretation?

If you choose this option, then feel free to use ~750 words to assess the overall reception of an assigned text, with details drawn from a range of reviews, comments, and publications (both popular and academic) and attention given to the particulars of its intended audience(s). Since you're assessing the reception of a text and describing its intended audience, you don't need to make an academic argument. Feel free to write for a broad, non-expert audience. (This is not a close reading assignment.) However, your assessment and description should be precise, drawing upon at least ten different sources across news outlets (such as newspapers and radio), social media, and academic journals.

**2) Geographic Location:** What is the geographic setting of the text, and why is that setting significant?

In ~750 words (MLA format), describe one geographic setting of an assigned text and explain why that setting is significant. Of note, this geographic setting should be an actual place that exists or once existed on Earth. As you write, consider the details that matter for the geography of fiction: names of countries and states/provinces, demographics, capital cities, urban and rural locations, histories of place, climate, landscape, (official) language(s), native and settler groups, and population numbers. To acquire this information, you may want to consult a variety of sources, including academic, official, and government publications as well as records such as census data. While you may refer to passages in your assigned text, the emphasis of this assignment should be on the particulars of an actual, geographic setting and its significance for the text.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- Where does the text take place?
- Where do characters say they are from? Where are they going? Where do they feel like they belong?
- What language(s) do they speak? How is language tied to location?
- How does the text describe its settings? From whose perspective(s)?
- What values does the text associate with land? With rural areas? With urban areas?
- How is history tied to people and places in the text?
- How is nature described? How is culture described? Where are they located?
- When you talk about settings in the text, how specific can you get? Country? City? Neighbourhood? Street? Building? Why does this specificity matter?
- How do questions of geography correspond with the aesthetics or politics of the text? What social or cultural issues does geography address?
- Have you been to places referenced in the text? To what effects on interpretation?

If you choose this option, then feel free to use ~750 words to describe one particular geographic setting in the text, with details and data drawn from a range of venues and publications. Since you're describing the setting of a text and explaining its significance, you don't need to make an academic argument. Feel free to write for a broad, non-expert audience. When you address the significance of the geographic setting, you can focus on the particulars of that setting instead of passages from your selected text. (This is not a close reading assignment.) However, your description of a geographic setting should be precise, drawing upon at least five different reliable sources.

**3) A Past Event:** When is a historical event mentioned in the text, and why is that event significant?

In ~750 words (MLA format), describe one past/historical event mentioned in an assigned text and explain why that event is significant. Of note, this event should be an actual event that occurred on Earth. As you write, consider the details that matter for histories of events: names, participants, dates, locations, descriptions, documentation, controversies, memories, and days of remembrance. To acquire this information, you may want to consult a variety of sources, including academic, official, and government publications as well as historical records. While you may refer to passages in your assigned text, the

emphasis of this assignment should be on the particulars of an actual, historical event and its significance for the text.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- What are the histories and events upon which your selected text relies?
- To which documents or records do characters refer?
- What events are remembered or mentioned often in the text?
- How is the event coded? With what or whom is it associated?
- Which historical events do the characters attend or participate in? Which events do they study or research?
- Which events haunt the text or its characters?
- Which events are represented, revised, or illustrated by the text?
- When does the text read more like non-fiction than fiction? Which historical events are used as material for that non-fiction?
- Which events do we assume actually happened? Which events appear fabricated?
- When do you trust the text's account of history or reality? When don't you? Why?
- How do you draw boundaries between fiction and history? To what effects on interpretation?

If you choose this option, then feel free to use ~750 words to describe one historical event mentioned in the text, with details and data drawn from a range of venues and publications. Since you're describing an event and explaining its significance, you don't need to make an academic argument. Feel free to write for a broad, non-expert audience. When you address the significance of the event, you can focus on the particulars of that event instead of passages from your selected text. (This is not a close reading assignment.) However, your description of an event should be precise, drawing upon at least five different reliable sources.

### ***Creativity (20% of your final mark)***

This writing assignment emphasizes creative integrations of fiction into your everyday life. It requires some thinking and practice beyond the essay format. For it, you have three options. Please choose one.

#### **1) Mimicry:** What do we learn from mimicking the texts we read?

Please identify an event or everyday occurrence from this term (e.g., something that just happened to you or something you do routinely) and write ~500 words



about it in the style or voice of an assigned text. Please also write ~300 words reflecting on what you learned about the text (in particular) and fiction (in general) from this act of mimicry.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- How would you describe the style or voice of the text you're about to mimic? Where possible, pick precise adjectives to describe it.
- If the text had a personality, then what would it be?
- Which passages do you find most compelling? Why?
- How long are the sentences? The paragraphs?
- When is the text specific or detailed? When is it vague? Why?
- What kind of vocabulary is used?
- How is dialogue written or expressed?
- What tense is most common?
- What types of figurative language are preferred?
- Do you notice any unique punctuation?
- Does the writing tend to "record" or "capture" what happened, or does it project its own world?
- When does the text make you laugh? Why?
- When does the text make you cry? Why?
- When does the text bore you? Why?
- When can't you put the text down? When do you put it down? Why?
- What subject positions and perspectives are represented by the text?
- How is the text narrated?
- How does it sound when you read it aloud?
- With which assigned text do you most identify? Least identify? To what degree is identification tied to mimicry?
- How can you mimic the writing sincerely, without irony or parody?

If you choose this option, then feel free to write a short, creative piece of mimicry (~500 words) based on your own, recent experiences, together with a reflection (~300 words) on what you learned from the process. Of course, the reflection may be informal, written in the first person, and steeped in your own perceptions of the writing experience as well as your own relation to the selected text. However, it should be precise and anchored in detail, and it should demonstrate some self-awareness of the decisions you made and their effects. The style of a compelling act of mimicry should be difficult to discern from the style of the original text, but the content should be based in (or represent) your everyday life. If you are working with a graphic novel, then you are more than welcome to illustrate a page or two instead of writing ~500 words.

## 2) Podcast: What do we learn from talking about texts with an audience?

Please identify an assigned text and create a three- to four-minute podcast episode that reviews the text for a specific audience. The episode should be composed with a particular podcast (that already exists) in mind, and you should identify the podcast and provide its URL in writing. The podcast should be accompanied by a script or transcript consisting of at least 450 words.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- What are some podcasts you enjoy? Why do you listen to them? How do they engage literature and culture? If you were to write an episode for them, then what would it sound like? What sort of content would be appropriate?
- How does talking about a book differ from writing about it? How would your style, delivery, and audience change across modes?
- What makes a good book review? When do you consult them? Why do others consult them? Why listen to one instead of reading it?
- Would you recommend your selected text to others? Why or why not?
- In a review, how do you balance attention to the particulars of a text with your general impressions of it?
- Who is the intended audience for your podcast? What would they expect from a review? Where and how would they listen to you? With headphones? In a car? At home?
- If you read a passage from your text aloud, then what does it sound like? Will you read passages aloud in your podcast?
- Have you heard the author of your text read aloud? If so, then what do they sound like? How could you include their voice in your podcast?
- What other sounds may accompany your voice and review?

If you choose this option, then feel free to compose a two- to four-minute review of your selected text and submit it via removable media or a URL in MP3 or WAV format. I will assess your podcast for its content, not its production. Please do not spend time on the particulars of either recording (including acoustics) or post-production (including editing and effects). Focus on content. You should submit your WAV or MP3 file with either a script written prior to the podcast (recommended) or a transcript produced from it (at least 450 words either way). For radio and podcasts, speaking 150 words per minute is the average. With your script or transcript, please provide the title and URL for the podcast you have in mind. I will be sure to listen to the podcast before I listen to the episode you've composed for it.

### 3) Quiz: What do we learn from designing quizzes about fiction?

Please identify an assigned text and create a quiz for it. You are free to select any type of quiz here, from one intended for a school setting (as if you're teaching the assigned text) to a personality or trivia quiz (to share online or among friends). Your quiz should contain at least ten questions, and you should have at least two people take it before you submit it to me. As you compose the quiz, I recommend making a spreadsheet for your questions, answers, and results. Please also write ~300 words reflecting on what you learned about your selected text (in particular) and fiction (in general) from this exercise in quiz design. Your reflection should account for the process of not only writing the quiz but also interpreting the answers you received.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- What sort of quiz do you like to take? Not like to take? Why?
- If you were teaching your selected text, then how would you quiz your students? What would you like them to demonstrate? Under what assumptions?
- What types of questions should your quiz ask? Multiple choice? Short answer? Fill-in-the-blank? Identification? A mix? What's your rationale here?
- How should you weigh and score the answers?
- How should people complete your quiz? On paper? Via a screen? Would they want to share their results?
- Who is your intended audience? Students? Fans? Scholars?
- What is the aim of your quiz? Fun? Education? Trivia? In literary studies, how do we draw the boundaries between fandom and scholarship?
- What kind of quiz seems appropriate for your selected text? How should you turn material from the text into material for a quiz? For instance, how do characters become personalities or passages become trivia? How does "what you read" become "what you should know"?
- What is the relationship between quizzes and games? How do both intersect with fiction?
- How might you experiment with the quiz as a form? How might the author of your selected text design a quiz?

If you choose this option, then feel free to design a quiz with at least ten questions, together with a reflection consisting of ~300 words. You can design the quiz on paper or with software. Either way, I will take the quiz while assessing it and your reflection. Just make sure I can access the correct

answers in some fashion. Of course, the reflection may be informal, written in the first person, and steeped in your own perceptions of the design experience as well as your own relation to the selected text. However, the reflection should still be precise and anchored in detail, and it should demonstrate some self-awareness of the decisions you made and their effects.

### **Workshops (10% of your final mark)**

For three different meetings during the term, I will ask you to participate in a writing workshop, for which you'll be given worksheets to complete while responding to and commenting on drafts by your peers. These worksheets will represent your participation in the workshops, be assessed accordingly, and together comprise 10% of your final mark.

### **Final Exam (30% of your final mark)**

At the term's end, I will administer the final exam during the official exam period. It will cover all texts assigned during the term and will consist of short-answer and multiple-choice questions as well as quote identifications. It will not include essays, and it will not be open-book.

## **ASSESSMENT**

The Department of English uses the following scale for grading purposes:

A+	90-100	B-	70-72
A	85-89	C+	65-69
A-	80-84	C	60-64
B+	77-79	D	50-59
B	73-76	F	0-49

I do not use plagiarism detection software when assessing student work, and final grades will be determined in accordance with the University's official grading system.

### **N Grades**

Students who submit the following will complete the course and will be assigned a final grade:

- One writing assignment, and
- The final exam.

Failure to complete these will result in an "N" regardless of the cumulative percentage on other assignments. An "N" is a failing grade, and it factors into your GPA as a 0 (the maximum percentage that can accompany an "N" on a transcript is 49).

### **Grading Rubric for All Writing Assignments**

A+: The content exceeds expectations of the prompt. It is incredibly focused and coherently integrates material from the selected text(s). It demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It reflects in-depth engagement with the selected text(s), and the argument/composition is incredibly persuasive. Overall, the response to the assignment is exceptional for undergraduate work.

A- through A: The content exceeds expectations of the prompt. It is focused and coherently integrates material from the selected text(s). It demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It reflects in-depth engagement with the selected text(s), and the argument/composition is persuasive. Overall, the response to the assignment is far above average for undergraduate work.

B- through B+: The content meets expectations of the prompt. It is focused and coherently integrates material from the selected text(s). It demonstrates some awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It reflects engagement with the selected text(s), and the argument/composition is sound. Overall, the response to the assignment is average or just above average for undergraduate work.

C or C+: The content meets some expectations of the prompt. It is somewhat focused and integrates some material from the selected text(s). It demonstrates minimal awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers few perspectives. It reflects engagement with the selected text(s); however, the argument/composition is not sound. Overall, the response to the assignment is average or just below average for undergraduate work.

D: The content does not meet expectations of the prompt. It is not focused, or it does not integrate material from the selected text(s). It does not demonstrate awareness of its own limitations or implications, or it does not consider multiple perspectives. It does not reflect engagement with the selected text(s), and the argument/composition is not sound. Overall, the response to the assignment is below average.

F: The content is missing or falls extremely short of the word count.

(Aspects of this grading rubric were borrowed from a syllabus by Mark Sample.)

## **Grading Rubric for All Writing Workshops**

A+: The circulated material and feedback exceed expectations of the prompt. They demonstrate active and thorough participation in the workshop as well as a respect for work by peers and a nuanced understanding of the revision process. Overall, the participation is exceptional at the undergraduate level.

A- through A: The circulated material and feedback exceed expectations of the prompt. They demonstrate active and thorough participation in the workshop as well as a respect for work by peers. Overall, the participation is far above average at the undergraduate level.

B- through B+: The circulated material and feedback meet expectations of the prompt. They demonstrate active participation in the workshop as well as a respect for work by peers. Overall, the participation is average or just above average at the undergraduate level.

C or C+: The circulated material and feedback meet some expectations of the prompt. They demonstrate participation in the workshop as well as a respect for work by peers. Overall, the participation is just below average at the undergraduate level.

D: The circulated material and feedback meet few or no expectations of the prompt. Overall, the participation is below average at the undergraduate level.

F: No participation in the workshop.

## **How to Do Well in this Course**

*Read the books before we discuss them.* Otherwise, you will not be able to follow lectures or conversations in class. Plus, demonstrating you've read the book means you'll likely do well on the final exam.

*Write while you read.* For me this means annotating a text as I read it. You can annotate print and digital texts. (See me if you need ideas or resources.)

*Come to class with ideas and questions.* Be curious. Seek connections not only between texts but also between this course and other courses you're taking.

*Take notes during class meetings.* A good portion of the final exam will cover what we talk about in class. Students who take notes not only understand but also retain the material better.

*Let me know when you don't follow what I'm saying.* I find this stuff fascinating, but I will not always know what you want to investigate or learn more about. If you have questions, then please don't hesitate to ask them. I don't want anyone to feel like an imposter in this course.

*Persuasive writing takes time.* Before you submit an assignment, consider circulating drafts. Ask friends or peers to give your writing a gander. Come chat with me during office hours. Consider how your writing can extend and even complicate our class discussions. Also, avoid writing that is primarily descriptive. Push your work into an analysis of the assumptions and ambiguities at work in literature.

*During class and in writing, be concrete when you comment on anyone's work* (including the fiction we're discussing). Quote it. Speak to specific gestures. And then respond with your own interpretations. When the work is by a peer, affirm their ideas (e.g., "I like how you...").

*Use class meetings to share ideas, but also discuss what we're reading outside of class.* If you have a question, then ask me or your classmates. If you hear something you want to remember, then write it down for reference later. If you feel like we're ignoring something important in class, then bring it to our attention. Consider forming reading and writing groups for the course.

("How to Do Well in this Course" adapted from a syllabus by Christopher Douglas.)

## **POLICIES**

### **Attendance**

You are expected to attend all classes in which you are enrolled. A department may require a student to withdraw from a course if the student is registered in another course that conflicts with it in time. An instructor may refuse a student admission to a lecture because of lateness, misconduct, inattention, or failure to meet the responsibilities of the course. Students who neglect their academic work, including assignments, may be refused permission to write the final examination in a course. Students who are absent because of illness, an accident, or family affliction should report to me upon their return to classes.

Aside from attending for the sake of attending, I create several incentives for you to come to class. Those incentives include: 1) lectures and discussion related to your assignments and exam, 2) mentioning material that will be on the exam, 3) clarification of key terms as well as aspects of the texts we're reading, 4) writing

workshops intended to help you revise and improve your work, and 5) encouraging you to speak with others about literature—and that's fun, too!

If you miss more than 20% of the scheduled class meetings (without documentation of illness, accident, or family affliction), then you may not qualify for the final exam.

### **Circulation of Marks**

I will not—at any time—post your marks outside my office door, online, or in any other public forum.

### **Participation**

Since conversations are essential to the quality of this class, we will work together to create an atmosphere premised on difference. University level discourse does not shy away from sensitive issues, including questions of race, gender, class, sexuality, politics, ability, and religion, and neither will we. There are going to be differences in opinions, beliefs, and interpretations when we read literature, question it, and engage history and culture. You need not agree with the arguments presented during class or with what your peers or I have to say—in fact, it is important to think critically and question course material. But please do so intelligently, without the assumption that everyone agrees with you or shares your experiences. Difference is central to creating a classroom in which a variety of ideas can be exchanged and points of view can be explored. Ultimately, what is crucial to this course is that you are comfortable expressing yourself and your ideas. If, for whatever reason, you are not, then you should notify me immediately by email or visit me during my office hours. I understand that some people are more comfortable speaking in front of the class than others. That said, participation in office hours also augments learning. If you are not comfortable bringing your concerns directly to me or are not satisfied with my response to your inquiries, then I encourage you to contact the Department of English.

### **Late and Missed Submissions**

If writing assignments are submitted after the due date, then I will not comment on them. Extension of a due date must be negotiated with me in advance, and medical or other emergency exceptions to this policy must be properly documented.

### **Mobile Technologies in the Classroom**

I do not ban laptops or other mobile technologies in the classroom. Feel free to use them for note-taking, in-class research, or other class-related activities.



**E-Mail**

With the exception of holidays and weekends, I will respond to your emails within twenty-four hours.

**Learning Climate**

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing, and protecting a positive, supportive, and safe working and learning environment for all its members. Students and faculty members are expected to adhere to the UVic human rights policy. Students should alert me immediately if they have any questions about this policy and its application, or if they have concerns about course proceedings or participants.

**Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to adhere to the UVic academic integrity policy. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade for the given assignment and may additionally result in a failing grade for the course. By taking this course, you agree that all submitted assignments may be subject to an originality review.

**Writing Improvement**

I may require you to seek general writing improvement and/or tutoring at The Learning and Teaching Centre. If so, then I may also ask you to revise your work within three weeks of receiving notice from me.

**Accessibility**

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, then please feel free to approach me and/or the Resource Centre for Students with a Disability (RCSD) as soon as possible. RCSD staff is available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know your needs, the sooner we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE TERRITORIES**

The Department of English respectfully acknowledges that the University of Victoria is situated on the territory of the Coast and Straits Salish peoples and sits on the site of a former Lkwungen village. We acknowledge and respect the Lekwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory the university resides and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationship with the land continues to this day.

## **SCHEDULE**

Although it is subject to change, below is the course outline as of Week 1.

### **Week 1 (January 5)**

Thursday: No Class (Jentery in Philadelphia for a conference)

### **Week 2 (January 9 + 12)**

Monday: Introductions and Course Overview

Thursday: *House on Mango Street* (read through “Hips”)

### **Week 3 (January 16 + 19)**

Monday: *House on Mango Street* (finish the book)

Thursday: *Beloved* (Chapters 1-6)  
**Review Prompts for Writing Assignments**

### **Week 4 (January 23 + 26)**

Monday: *Beloved* (Chapters 7-18)

Thursday: *Beloved* (Chapters 19-25)  
**Writing Workshop: First Writing Assignment**

### **Week 5 (January 30 + February 2)**

Monday: *Beloved* (finish the book)

Thursday: *Geek Love* (Chapters 1-11)  
**Due: First Writing Assignment**

### **Week 6 (February 6 + 9)**

Monday: *Geek Love* (Chapters 12-25)

Thursday: *Geek Love* (finish the book)

**Week 7 (February 13 + 16)**

Reading Break

**Week 8 (February 20 + 23)**

Monday: “This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona” and “The Fun House” from *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*

Thursday: Movie adaptation study of “This Is What It Means . . .”

**Week 9 (February 27 + March 2)**

Monday: *Fun Home* (Chapters 1-4)

Thursday: *Fun Home* (finish the book)

**Week 10 (March 6 + 9)**

Monday: *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Chapters 1-2)  
**Writing Workshop: Second Writing Assignment**

Thursday: *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (finish Part I)

**Week 11 (March 13 + 16)**

Monday: *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (finish Part II)  
**Due: Second Writing Assignment**

Thursday: *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (finish the book)

**Week 12 (March 20 + 23)**

Monday: *Americanah* (Chapters 1-15)

Thursday: *Americanah* (Chapters 16-25)

**Week 13 (March 27 + 30)**

Monday: *Americanah* (Chapters 26-45)  
**Writing Workshop: Third Writing Assignment**

Thursday: *Americanah* (finish the book)

**Week 14 (April 3)**

Monday: Review  
**Due: Third Writing Assignment**