

ENGH 201-036 | Reading and Writing About Texts

Friday 10:30-1:10, Robinson B 218

Professor Jeffrey Lipack

jlipack@masonlive.gmu.edu

Office Hours – Monday 2-3, Robinson B TA Lounge

The Course

This is a language course. We will be reading words strung together in sentences written out by people of all races, religions, genders and times. What a thing! To be able to receive ideas from people you will never meet, who spoke different languages than you, and lived and died before you were ever born. To be given a perspective, a lens, a story.

And while there is no set value for a single story, stories can be worth quite a lot. I think the best ones are worth a moment which transcends time. Language written 1 or 100 or 10,000 year(s) ago remains (roughly) the same. And while at first, this may not appear to have much tangible use, it offers an incredible opportunity. The writers you will explore have left vessels into a moment. Perhaps not a moment in history, but a moment in a human being's mind. Some moments take place over an hour, some over a day and some much more. They explore people— a single human life— their relationships and the world they inhabit.

These moments look at some of the world's most complex problems. As such, we will be discussing some of the world's most complex problems. This brings with it a responsibility to understand the (many) freedoms and (few) boundaries of discussion, something we will go over on the first day.

Methods of Instruction

This is not a lecture course. It is intended to be a discussion based course, however such a distinction is only made possible when the class participates. **The easiest way to participate is to do the reading!** Knowing the material makes discussing it... possible. Not reading, does the opposite. I will not be standing and flipping through power points. Instead, my role will ideally be leading discussion and giving context, or clarification where necessary/possible.

Course Goals

By the end of the semester you will be able to:

1. read carefully and with depth by making observations and determining how they inform interpretations;
2. think more critically about literary texts;

3. analyze the ways literary language, devices, and conventions contribute to understanding texts;
4. understand that literature does not exist in a bubble but can have certain social, political, historical, and cultural contexts;
5. join the conversation of literary criticism by identifying arguments in their own and other's writing.

Mason Core

This course is also part of The Mason Core, (General Education) Program, which is designed to help develop "A Mason Graduate [who is] an engaged citizen, a well-rounded scholar, and someone who is prepared to act for the world" (Mason Catalog). For more information on the mission of the Mason Core, visit the Provost's Mason Core page.

Texts

1. *Solibio Magnificent* by Patrick Chamoiseau
2. *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde
3. And assorted short stories

Materials

1. Pen and paper
2. Blackboard
3. That days reading material

Policies

[technology] Ideally our technology will be pen and paper, however, we will discuss the options for taking notes or bringing in reading material (via laptops/tablets), in class the first day. Outside of the class we will use blackboard for various things.

[late work] As a rule of thumb, late papers & other work will lose 1/3 of a letter grade for each calendar day they are late, and major assignments will not be accepted after 1 week.

[inclement weather] If the university is closed, check your Mason email for schedule modifications. We will likely have an online class or activities to help us stay on track. If the weather is bad, check the GMU website at <http://www.gmu.edu>. You can also sign up for [Mason Alert](#) to have university closures and other critical information emailed or texted to you.

[plagiarism] Be Reasonable. Mason has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Here are three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all

times: (1) all work submitted must be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, OR opinions, OR facts/information from another person without giving that person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using MLA format. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in an academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me. In addition, here is the English Department's statement: <http://english.gmu.edu/faculty/plagiarism>

Assignments

[Annotations] One of many ways to approach reading is to consider it a conversation. You, the reader, are in a conversation with the work. As such, it is important to not let the conversation get one sided. So, instead of a journal, each class you will be asked to bring a hard copy of the readings with your annotations on them. For short stories this will mean printing out that days reading, for the novels you can mark right in them (unless you rent which we will discuss). The comments and questions you make as you read will help our own conversations in the classroom. These comments will vary in length week to week, but should be somewhere in the ballpark of 100-150 words for each class. We will go over strategies to annotate effectively, as well as what is expected, early on in the semester.

Please note that some days you will be asked to **read your annotations aloud to the class and in small groups** as a way to both spearhead and jumpstart conversations on the related text.

[One Word Essays] While the annotations will be your main way of conversing with the text, these short (750-1000 word) essays will be more about pulling from the text. Here you will be asked to pick out one word, any word that you feel is important to or symbolic of the novels we will read. You will take that word and explore it as a word (its origins, uses, definitions) as well as its uses within the text.

We will go over this more closely when we begin our first novel.

[Final Creative Project/Exam] To end the semester you will be given two options. Option A will consist of final creative project. Whether you choose to write a story, create a video, or other work of art, is entirely up to you (within some boundaries). Option B will be a more traditional "Final exam" consisting of short essay and multiple-choice questions. We will go over both of these options in depth as the semester progresses. Length requirements for this will vary based on your chosen medium and will be discussed further in class (around 1500 words).

[formatting] Papers should be written with a conventional typeface (e.g. Times New Roman, Garamond, etc.) in 12 point, double-spaced throughout (no extra spaces between paragraphs or sections) except for a single-spaced section on the upper left-hand corner with your name, the date, the course title, my name, and the course number. Every paper should have a clear, descriptive title (not “essay 1”) in the center in bold font. All citations should be made according to MLA style. For clarification, see the Purdue OWL. Papers not in this format will lose points.

[submitting] Papers and major assignments will typically be turned in through blackboard. Annotations will be used and turned in during class.

[reading quizzes and other assignments] Reading quizzes are a concrete way for me to gauge who is and who is not doing the reading. If early on in the course, discussion is lively and I feel that our class is doing the reading, quizzes will be replaced with participation and in class activities. If not, quizzes will be used to “encourage” you to do the reading.

Grading

[midterm grades] Chances are high that you will simply get a B for your midterm grades. This is because many of your grades will come in the second half of the semester.

[final grades]

A+ 100-97.5% | A 97.4-93% | A- 92.9-90% | B+ 89.9-87.5% | B 87.4-83% | B- 82.9-80% | C+ 79-77.5% | C 77.4-73% | C- 72.9-70% | D 69.9-60% | F 59.9% and below.

10% participation

15% reading quizzes/in class assignments

20% Annotations

30% One Word Essays (15% each)

25% final project/exam

[participation] You can earn full points by being on time to class and actively engaged: this means paying attention and contributing to class discussions. You can be in class and earn no participation points if you are disengaged, distracted, or abusing technology. Attendance is necessary in order to earn a good grade; **you are allowed 2 excused absences.**

[assignments] In-class work and homework will be scored pass/fail. If you are actively working to improve and engaging with the assignment in full, you will receive a pass. If assignments are missing or incomplete, you will receive a fail.

[papers] A “C” level grade (70-79%) denotes average college-level writing skills. A “C” essay is a competent response to the assignment: it meets, to some degree, all the assignment requirements, and demonstrates that the student has put significant time and effort into communicating ideas to the appropriate audience. It has a thesis, presents some support, and

moves from point to point in an orderly fashion. Sentence-level errors do not significantly prevent comprehension. Essays that do not meet these criteria will not earn a “C.”

A “B” level grade (80-89%) recognizes a strong example of college writing and thinking. In addition to meeting the “C” level requirements, a “B” essay demonstrates some insight into the topic, provides original and thorough support that is tightly woven into the overall argument, reads smoothly at both the sentence and paragraph levels, and/or exhibits a personal “voice” or style. Sentence-level errors do not at all prevent comprehension or are absent entirely.

An “A” level grade (90-100%) signifies an essay that demonstrates an awareness of the methods and practices in the field, is written in a clear and engaging style, uses a wide range of supporting evidence and engages the reader in a provocative conversation. An essay at this level is sharp, original, surprising, and/or poignant.

“D” and “F” level essays do not meet the basic expectations of the assignment.

Other Dates/Resources

[Add/Drop] The last day to drop this class without a tuition penalty is January 29th, after that, you can drop by February 12th with a 33% tuition penalty. The final deadline to drop is February 23rd, and that will incur a 67% tuition penalty. There is also a selective withdrawal period we can discuss more if the need arises.

[Office of Disability Services] ods.gmu.edu (703) 993-2474

Speak with me privately if you need accommodations for this course. I am happy to provide reasonable accommodations and supports, but they must be arranged through ODS. It’s their job, as part of GMU’s commitment to equal treatment of people with disabilities, to implement and coordinate reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities.

University Writing Center: writingcenter.gmu.edu

Fenwick and Johnson Center Libraries: library.gmu.edu

Counseling and Psychological Services: caps.gmu.edu

Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Multicultural Education: odime.gmu.edu

Office for Academic Integrity: oai.gmu.edu

Office of the University Registrar: registrar.gmu.edu