

## **ENGL 417**

### **Indigenous Literature**

Dr. Kara Thompson  
MW 2:00-3:20  
Tucker 111

#### **CONTACT**

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Office hours: MW 3:30-4:30 & by appointment

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

As Choctaw writer LeAnne Howe puts it, “Native stories are power. They create people. They author tribes.” This semester we will read an assemblage of contemporary fiction, nonfiction, and poetry by Native/Indigenous writers of North America. But right away, I need to explain, backtrack, and rewrite that sentence because *contemporary* or genre distinctions such as *fiction*, *nonfiction*, and *poetry* limit and enclose what these texts have to teach us about time, space, and the profound and productive work of the imagination.

To subjugate entire nations of people, colonizers will try to take the stories away. The colonizer will try to erase cultural memory or destroy and criminalize rituals—but stories are carriers of memory and ritual, of personal and collective identities. The texts we will read demonstrate remarkable acts of survival and endurance in the face of over 500 years of ongoing colonization and illegal occupation of Native/Indigenous homelands. In moments, they are funny and surprising; in others, full of pain and trauma. But most importantly, they exist and persist. They create.

You may find some of the readings entertaining, even riveting; they may be relevant to your own familial or personal histories, or the authors and subject matter may be entirely new. And you may not like some of the texts; some of them will surely challenge your paradigms and worldviews, and this can be discomfiting. But by taking this class, you sign up for a commitment to reading, and to discussions that take the readings seriously.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

- To engage critically and attentively with Native/Indigenous stories, from creation stories, novels, poems, and essays to some contemporary political actions and cultural histories
- To expand your knowledge base of Native/Indigenous cultures, politics, and histories
- To provoke your curiosity and imagination, and inspire you to keep reading Native/Indigenous literature well after this semester ends
- To develop a critical reading practice
- To learn strategies for close reading
- To practice summary and analysis, with specific attention to the key differences between them

**REQUIRED TEXTS TO PURCHASE, RENT, OR BORROW FROM A LIBRARY**

\*\* This means you will have your own copy of the book, and bring it to class on the appropriate day.

Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007)

Louise Erdrich, *The Round House* (2012)

Joy Harjo, *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems 1976-2002* (2002)

LeAnne Howe, *Chocktalking on Other Realities* (2013)

Thomas King, *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993)

Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)

Leanne Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love* (2015)

James Welch, *Winter in the Blood* (1974)

Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (1994)

**REQUIRED SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS**

These will be posted on Blackboard to read in advance of the respective class meeting. Please print a copy OR bring a device to class with which to access the reading during lecture/discussion.

**SUMMARY OF GRADES**

Creative Nonfiction: 10%

Character Map & A Different Map: 10%

Reading Group: 15%

I didn't know...: 20%

Blog (5 entries): 25% total

Final: 20%

**COURSE FORMAT**

The course will be a combination of lecture, large-group discussion, and small-group (including one-on-one) work. There are no set days for each of these activities, so be prepared for any and all before each class meeting.

**POLICIES**

**Attendance:** Being present in class—both physically and mentally—is crucial to building a cohesive and collegial community. If you miss class more than twice (for illness, inescapable appointments, religious holidays, etc.), it will affect your final grade. If you know you will be absent from class, please provide documentation as soon as possible. If you do not attend class, it is your responsibility to ask your reading group for details and catch up.

**Participation:** I take your active participation in this course very seriously. If your final grade is on the border, for instance, your participation record across the semester could bump the grade up or down. What does participation mean?

- Attendance in class
- Active participation in our class discussions. If you have specific reasons for why you are unable to participate verbally in discussion, please see me **no later than the second week of class** so that we may work out a reasonable accommodation. Otherwise, I take daily attendance and I record your participation in class.
- Attentive listening to your peers
- Respectful responses—disagreement is okay (and good!), but respond directly and with evidence if you plan to debate a particular point.
- Be an active and supportive member of your reading group.
- Bring your book to class, and have it out and ready to go. Set other distractions aside.
- And perhaps this is obvious, but: **READ**. Make sure you read the assigned selections *before* each class meeting. I cannot stress how important it is that you stay engaged with the readings.

If you need disability-related accommodations for your work in this course, please inform me as soon as possible. For assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs, contact Student Accessibility Services in the Campus Center, Room 109 or at 757-221-2509.

Because many disabilities cannot be easily diagnosed and certified by disability services, I strive for my courses to follow the principles of Universal Design, which is defined as “accommodation for the widest audience possible.” My ultimate goal is to structure the course in a way that accommodates most students while still meeting individual needs. This policy requires a commitment from you as well: be communicative with me *and* support your peers.

**Mobile Devices:** Off and stored away. I will not tolerate errant rings/dings in class—these are extremely disruptive and disrespectful. Please, for the love of all that is good, do not text during class.

**Laptops:** A few of our readings will be in pdf or another electronic form, so I understand the need for your computer in class. In fact, if you choose not to print the articles, you must bring your computer or relevant device in order to have direct access to the reading. However, use of laptops for anything not related to the class lecture or discussion (random Internet browsing, iMessage, etc) will mean losing laptop privileges. This means you will be required to print hardcopies of the readings and bring those to class.

But the majority of our readings are from the books you are required to purchase. Please email me or make an appointment if you need accommodations (for reading or note taking) that require your laptop.

**Timeliness:** Assignments must be submitted on time in order to receive full credit. I will deduct 1/3 of a grade for each 24 hours an assignment is late (i.e., from B+ to B). You will not get credit for assignments submitted later than one week past the original deadline without a written extension. Requests for extensions must be submitted by email at least **72 hours prior** to the assignment due date and are generally available only for extenuating circumstances. Late papers may not receive written comments. No late assignments will be accepted past the end of reading period without an approved incomplete from the Dean of Studies. Extensions on the final project also require an incomplete. There are no exceptions to this policy.

## OTHER DETAILS

**Assignment format:** Unless otherwise noted, all must be double-spaced with a standard font type and size (preferably 12 pt.). Include your name, the date, and page numbers. Please be sure to proofread carefully for style and grammar. Use the *Modern Language Association* style sheet for in-text citations and works cited pages. Papers that do not follow proper formatting instructions may receive a 1/3-grade deduction.

**Email:** I check my email regularly but not obsessively. Do not expect a response from me until at least 24 hours after your email was sent. If you don't receive a response within 24 hours, then please email me again to be sure I received the first email.

**Plagiarism and Honor Code:** Plagiarism ranges from lifting sentences or passages from a source without citing, to recycling an entire assignment written by another person. Plagiarizing will result in failing the assignment, and possibly the course. I follow the policies described in the College of William and Mary [Honor Code](#). If you have any questions about academic honesty, citation, or the relationship of the Honor Code to your work in this course, please let me know.