

ENGL 417: Indigenous Literature
Fall 2016

Assignments Due This Semester: Dates & Descriptions

August 31: Creative Nonfiction

September 7: Character map

September 12: I didn't know... 1

September 14: Updated character map

September 19: Reading group meeting #1 (in class): Designate one recorder to post synopsis of the meeting. Must post by 10:00 pm today.

September 21: I didn't know... 2

September 26: Blog post 1

October 3: I didn't know... 3

October 5: Blog post 2

October 12: Reading group meeting #2: Designate the next recorder to post synopsis of the meeting. Must post by 10:00 pm today.

October 17: I didn't know... 4

October 19: Reading group meeting #3: Designate the next recorder to post synopsis of the meeting. Must post by 10:00 pm today.

October 24: Blog post 3

October 26: Brief description/proposal of final project

October 31: I didn't know... 5

November 7: Reading group meeting #4: Designate the final recorder to post synopsis of the meeting. Must post by 10:00 pm today.

November 9: Blog post 4

November 14: Proposal for final project

November 21: A Different Map

November 28: Blog post 5

December 5: Final

Creative Nonfiction

Write an essay that locates your relationship to Native America. By *relationship* and *Native America* I mean your engagement and experience with, or knowledge of, American Indian history, politics, culture, land, people, and so on. You may choose a very specific experience, or you may think more broadly. Perhaps you will write about where you are from and how this space constructed your sense of Native America (this would be a broad approach), or perhaps you once visited a tourist attraction that capitalizes on Native America and you want to write about that experience (a more specific approach). Have you been to, or lived on, a reservation? Do you identify as American Indian, Native, or Indigenous? Do you know people who identify as American Indian, Native, or Indigenous? You may also choose to write about a cultural production, such as a film or novel, that was formative in your understanding of Native America.

You may even think at first that you do not have a “relationship to Native America,” but the main objective of this first essay is to realize that—even indirectly—we all do by the virtue of our presence on this land. Therefore, you may even write about what you do not know, what you have not experienced directly and how this impacts you. To get started, you may consider the following questions:

- What can we learn about Native America through individual, personal experiences?
- What can't we learn?
- How do memory and identity shape our present understanding of history or a specific experience?

Secondary Sources: No outside research is required, but I certainly encourage you to bring in other sources if they help you or your readers. I have called this essay, “creative nonfiction” because this should not read as a personal journal entry, but instead a critical engagement with a personal history or experience. Put differently, do not write about something you don’t want exposed to comment or critique by your reader.

Objective: This paper will give me a better sense of your background knowledge and experiences that will inform your overall approach to this course. Second, this is an opportunity for you to reflect on an important term for us this semester, *accountability*. Questions you should consider (but do not need necessarily to answer directly) should

include: What does accountability mean? For Native/American Indian-identified folks, how can I be accountable to my family and my community? For non-Native/American Indian/Indigenous folks, how can I be an ally? What are the limits of allyship?

Character Map

A character map refers to a list or graphic representation of characters in a novel or story with brief descriptions for each character—these could include physical or personality traits, how the character relates to others, or what their main role in the narrative seems to be.

The map can be typed *or* drawn. I encourage you to devise creative or graphic ways of presenting the characters. But if you choose simply to write a list with descriptions, then please type (rather than handwrite).

I didn't know...

The texts we will read this semester will likely surprise you, in different ways and for different reasons. In some cases, the historical references will be entirely new to you, or maybe you haven't heard of a specific tribe to which an author belongs. Or, if you've heard of the tribe, you don't know where its citizens currently live, or where their ancestral home is. Or maybe there is a political issue you're unfamiliar with, but with which a certain novel or poem is concerned.

This assignment gives you the opportunity to explore one of these issues in brief and write a short (no more than 500 words) synopsis of what you learned. These should be typed and brought to class on days designated in the schedule.

You need to make an effort to research beyond Wikipedia, or the first search hit that appears. Your research strategies will of course depend on the topic, but here are some general suggestions:

- Try to access resources written by Native/Indigenous people specifically, or issued by the tribe.
- Access Native media sources, like *Indian Country Today* or call-in radio shows such as *Native American Calling* or *NextGen Native* (free on i-Tunes).
- Stream rez radio

The purpose of this assignment is to help you become a better-informed reader of the primary and supplementary sources in our class. In turn, you will make an effort to bring these new concepts or contexts to the large-group discussions.

A Different Map

Our final novel, Karen Tei Yamashita's *The Tropic of Orange*, makes several direct and fascinating arguments about space and borders (though I suspect this topic will, and should, come up in several different ways throughout the semester). For this assignment, you will bring to class and briefly present a map that represents something other than latitudinal and longitudinal space. As I hope you always do: Take a risk. Use your imagination.

Reading Group

During the second week of class, you will form a reading group with three other people.

On designated days throughout the semester, you will meet during class with your group to discuss the readings. After your meeting, you will post a brief letter or synopsis on Blackboard of what you discussed, specific questions that came up, or topics your group would like to discuss with the rest of your colleagues.

You will take turns serving as the reading group's archivist.

Blog

Each of you has a blog on Blackboard (accessible via the Blog tool), listed according to your name on the roster. If you go by a name other than what is on the roster, please change the name of your blog accordingly.

You will write a total of **five** posts this semester.

Create a new entry for each of your five posts.

Each entry must be at least 500 words. The topics are open, but here are some guidelines to help you get started:

- Choose a resonant passage and write a close reading/analysis of this passage.
- Select a character who particularly intrigues you and write a short analysis of this character. Why or how is this character set apart from the others for you? How does this character elicit contradiction, or strike a certain tension in the narrative?
- How and when does the text seem to write against itself, or contradict itself? Or how did a certain moment surprise you?
- How does a particular style point or formal aspect create its own argument, or lead you to an argument about the text?

There are certainly many other approaches to take—these are just some examples. But DO NOT write a plot summary. We can turn to Wikipedia or Good Reads for that (although those entries are often inadequate, but that's another story). Your blog should advance your own reading and understanding of the text, and model a critical reading practice for your colleagues as well.

Nor is a reaction or opinion piece appropriate for this assignment. In other words, do not write 500 words about how you liked/loathed the book or a character or the author. The purpose of your blog is to write short critical (i.e. in-depth, analytical) essays about a literary text.

Final

This is up to you, mostly. You will submit two proposals to me: The first will offer a brief description, some general ideas you have in mind; the second will offer an in-depth description or précis of the project. You will also include its format, research methods, length and scope. You must include grading criteria, or how you think the project should be evaluated.

Here are some ideas, but I encourage you to come up with others:

- Create a podcast or other multimedia project.
- Imagine you will be a tour guide for the Brafferton Indian school (now the offices of the Provost and President). Write a script.
- Write a (real) grant proposal.
- Write an article to submit to a magazine or online publication.
- Write a standard, you-know-the-form final critical essay/analysis.

The only forms/projects off limits are fiction (including plays) and poetry. But I have full veto power, which is why you will submit first a brief description of the project, then a more detailed proposal.