**English 202B: Advanced Rhetoric and Composition**

*Writing in the Humanities*

History and Theories of Literacy: Constructing Identity (Only Connect!)

TR 8:00-9:15 / 319 Willard Building

Section 009 / Instructor: Lorentzen

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OFFICE HOURS: T 4:00-5:00 / W 2:00-3:00 / R 11:15-12:15 and by appointment.

Course Description: Development, skills, and expertise in reading and writing can never be separated; therefore, **Writing in the Humanities** is an intensive reading and writing course, with this section thematized on "histories and theories of literacy." Because ENGL202B "asks students to consider problems or issues of perennial concern to those in the humanities," our section will concentrate on the connection between literacy and identity. Our reading across the genres on issues of what counts as "literacy," on reading and writing and speaking practices inside and outside the academy, within and across academic disciplines and various communities, and up and down socioeconomic (class?) categories, will serve as a basis for our classroom discussions of what constitutes effective writing. I am hopeful that our readings, discussions, and writing workshops will enable you to become a stronger, more confident, and more flexible writer than you were when the term started.

I imagine that you will become more attuned to your goals as a writer in terms of any exigence for writing about a particular topic in a particular way, the on-going conversation surrounding the topic, the appropriate delivery of your information, the various appeals at your disposal, and the needs and expectations of your audience. Whether you decide to explore the issue of discipline-specific literacy, literacy narratives, literacy myths (get educated, get rich and powerful), historicized / contextualized literate practices, community literacy, everyday literacy, literacy themes in contemporary literature, literacy in at-risk classrooms or communities, popular literacies, cultural literacy, critical literacy, workplace literacy, or transformative literacy, (or any other constellation of situation and literate practice), you will want to write with skill, conviction, and grace.

We will begin the semester by examining traditional notions of literacy and identity, in an effort to expand our understanding of the many contexts in which literacies play a part. After discussing personal literacies, we will move into the area of academic literacies (if, indeed, they are separable), and scrutinize the part schools play in constructing literacy and identity. We will contemplate what constitutes a contemporary liberal arts education in the humanities at the university level through an evaluation of curricula, pedagogical strategies and methods, and educational philosophies. After exploring the relative merits of a "Great Books" tradition, and the use of literature in the writing classroom, we will practice what we preach by tackling a novel ourselves -- a text that, in many ways, probes the same kind of questions about the connections between literacy and identity that we hope to cover as a class. We will conclude our semester by examining alternative pedagogical sites that involve the kinds of specific literacies that are often forgotten or devalued when scholars
investigate the construction of identity through literacy. A brief look at film literacy, cultural literacy, media literacy, and internet/computer literacy, and an inquiry into how these literacies also help us learn to construct identity, will provide a nice conclusion to a very busy semester.

Please note: If attendance might be a problem for you, or if you are looking for formal instruction in resume / job letter writing, please seek out another 202 section immediately.

Texts:

*Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind (CAM).
*Giroux, Channel Surfing (CS).
*Forster, Howards End (HE).
*Rose, Lives on the Boundary (LB).
*A collection of outside reading material available in the filing cabinet of the English Department mailroom in 116 Burrowes Building (FC).

Other necessary resources:

*That good college dictionary you received for high school graduation.
*A handbook that demonstrates documentation, citation, and bibliographic conventions, according to MLA (the Modern Language Association). The MLA Handbook is a sure bet.

Class Listserve: In addition to these texts, you need to have an e-mail account, since we may use a listserv to conduct business. I may also be sending announcements, updated assignments, and writing prompts through e-mail. You may also find yourself using your e-mail account to exchange ideas and drafts / parts of drafts with your writing group for commenting. If you have not already activated your access account, please do so immediately. To activate your account, take your Penn State ID to an automatic signature station and follow the instructions there. Stations are located at 103 Boucke, 6 Findlay Commons, W111 Pattee, 112 Redifer Commons, 107 Waring Commons, 108 Warnock Commons, and 2 Willard.

Accommodation and Alternative Formats: The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell me as soon as possible. It is your responsibility to provide your professors with formal documentation necessary of your special need.

Course Requirements: You will be expected to (1) attend all class meetings, prepared -- period; (2) participate in class discussions; (3) actively participate in in-class writing exercises; (4) participate fully in writing workshops and group work; (5) submit six, one-page response papers; (6) propose, draft, write, and revise assignments of various lengths and purposes; (7) submit all work on time (on the hour / day it is due); and (8) submit a one-folder portfolio of all of your written work for this course -- proposals, drafts, and revisions of papers, group work and peer review, in-class writing, short exercises, statements. Nota Bene: Passing the course requires timely completion of all of the assignments, long and short, in-class and out-of-class, as well as perfect or near-perfect attendance.
Grades:

*5 Response Papers (no more than one each Friday; you choose the Fridays) @ 5% each = 30%.
(In one, single-spaced page, you make a specific persuasive argument that engages that week's reading, keeping one foot in your own world of experience and one foot in the text.)
*1 Personal Literacy Narrative and 2 Short Formal Papers (4-5 pages) @ 10% each = 30%
*1 Outline / Annotated Bibliography / Overview of research based assignment @ 10%.
*1 research based assignment (10-12 pp.) @ 20%.
*Class participation / Group Work / Homework / In-class Writings @ 10%.

*Total = 100%.

* Grading standards are the same in ENGL202B as they are in English 15.
** Attendance will count toward your grade. In a Tuesday/Thursday section, your grade can be lowered 1/3 of a letter grade per day (or more) after your first two absences. I expect that when you absolutely must be absent, you will act in a professional manner by informing me of your absence, in advance, via e-mail or telephone.

CLASS SCHEDULE (subject to change):

Readings and writing assignments are listed on the day they are due. Additional reading and writing assignments, prompts for formal papers, and peer-response workshops will be inserted throughout the term -- as will frequent, unannounced in-class writings. (Check your e-mail regularly to keep up with the class schedule.)

Jan. 12: Introduction to the course, introductions of students and teacher, create class roster (name, phone number, e-mail). In-class writing assignment.

Jan. 14: Defining literacy/literacies and making the connection with identity. Group work.

Jan. 19: WL: "Reading as a Writer" (4-7); "Personal Literacies"; Orwell, "Why I Write"; Williams, "Turning Topsy Turvey"; Scribner, "Literacy in Three Metaphors."


Jan. 26: WL: Douglass, "Chapter VII from Narrative."

Jan. 28: LB: Chapters 1-3; pages 1-65.

Feb. 2: LB: Chapters 4-6; pages 67-165. Personal literacy narrative due. (If you think you might need or want to revise this paper, you must submit all your rough work, as well as all group work. And your group must submit your response to each
of their papers. This requirement for revision is non-negotiable.) See the list of prompts at the end of this syllabus, also look at WL 133-135.

Feb. 4:
LB: Chapters 7-8, epilogue; pages 167-242.

Feb. 9:

Feb. 11:
WL: Moraga, "It's the Poverty"; hooks, "Confronting Class in the Classroom."

Feb. 16:
FC: Brueggemann, "On (Almost) Passing"; Brueggemann, "It's So Hard to Believe That You Pass."

Feb. 18:
FC: Kleege, "Voices in My Head"; Kleege, "Call It Blindness."

Feb. 23:
Draft workshop for Short Formal Essay #1 -- complete, word-processed drafts are due -- no exceptions!

Feb. 25:

Mar. 2:

Mar. 4:

Mar. 16:
CAM: "Culture," "Values."

Mar. 18:

Mar. 23:
Draft workshop for Short Formal Essay #2 -- complete, word-processed drafts are due -- no exceptions!

Mar. 25:
Short Formal Essay #2 due. HE: Chapters 1-14.

Mar. 30:
HE: Chapters 15-34.

Apr. 1:
HE: Chapters 34-44.

Apr. 6:
Film literacy and problems with translation -- screening James Ivory's Howards End. Outline / Annotated Bibliography / Overview for research paper due.

Apr. 8:
Finish screening Howards End.

Apr. 15: CS: "Hollywood and the Demonization of Youth," "Bashing the Sixties."


Apr. 22: FC: Turkle, "TinySex and Gender Trouble," "Virtuality and Its Discontents."

Apr. 27: Beyond Springfield: Media Literacy, The Simpsons, and Oppositional Culture.

Apr. 30: REQUIRED PORTFOLIO DUE. Conclusion and class evaluations.
Writing the Personal Literacy Narrative

On [insert date], the first of your formal written assignments is due, your personal literacy narrative. I strongly advise you to get your writing group up and going—and active—so that you can work together on your writing, making sure that you meet the following criteria and address the following issues. NB: If you think you might want/need to revise this assignment, you must submit all your rough work as well as all your group work. You must demonstrate—in writing—that you’ve given and received substantial peer response in writing. Finally, your submitted essay must be pretty good overall, demonstrating that you invested time and thought.

Please write a four-page, double-spaced essay describing yourself as a literate person, both individually and communally literate. You will undoubtedly have to edit down to make this 4-page limit. Your essay should have
1. a title;
2. an introduction;
3. an obvious thesis;
4. well-developed and focused paragraphs that support, expand, develop, and illustrate that thesis (topic sentences will help you achieve this goal);
5. transitional words or phrases that help lead your readers through your essay; and
6. a point/conclusion (not a repetition of your introduction).

Your essay should shine with purpose and meaning and movement.

In the broadest sense, this assignment asks you to reflect in some way upon the roles that reading, writing, and community have played in your life—to consider, in other words, how you became the literate person you are now and are still in the process of becoming.

There are a number of ways that you might want to approach this assignment—and there is no “right” way. But to help you explore the various ways that you might develop this essay, I am sketching out some ideas/prompts for you. (Please note that WL, pp. 133-35 offers you additional and terrific ideas.) These various prompts may help you with the invention of your essay—but they won’t help you much with the arrangement. Therefore, you may want to freewrite responses to several of the prompts, look over what you’ve written, talk with the folks in your writing group, and then strategize an effective argument. Some students have successfully described their literacy development chronologically, but that organizational pattern may not be the best one for you. Whatever pattern you employ (chronological, material, spatial, developmental, relational, whatever), choose and use it consciously. Reread that last sentence, please.

Additional prompts:

*Focus on one or more significant experiences in your development/identity as a reader/writer. For example, you could focus on a particular time period (early literacy experiences, jr. high school, the present), or you could discuss several different times in your life and the relationship among them. You could develop a theme, or you could explore dissonances. How has/does your literacy relate to your identity?

*What is the relationship between the three metaphors of literacy that Scribner describes in WL and your own literacy development? or What is the relationship between Orwell’s reasons for reading and writing and your own literacy development. Or merge the two essays with your own.

*Explore the relationship between schooling and literacy in your life or between schooling/literacy and identity. What emotions do you associate with various moments in your development as a schooled reader/writer? Some theorists believe that schooling attempts to “tame” reading and writing of its “wildness”: how did/do you respond to those efforts? Can you recall specific acts of resistance to schooled literacy and schooled literacy practices? As a university student, what role does literacy play in your life or your identity?
Another way of getting at a similar issue: explore the relationship between the private and public uses of reading/writing in your life. Our earliest experiences are often private—listening to bedtime stories, half scribbling/half drawing stories for our family. Over time, a shift occurs, one that makes more public our literate identity. What does that shift mean to you? Has it been a dramatic shift? Has it taken multiple shifts? Followed a steady path? Left you with questions—or answers?

Reflect on social, cultural, or political influences upon your reading/writing or upon your identity as a literate person. How did/does your family view/value literacy? If you (have) claimed an identity as literate person or a writer or a reader, how did/does that identity connect or separate you from your home and other communities? What does "claiming an identity as a ______" mean to you? What influences have caused you to feel as you do? What role has literacy played as you have established relationships with others at various points in your life? Has your reading/writing/literacy meant different things to you at different times of your life? What influences have others—a friend, coworker, teacher, etc.—had on your literacy identity?

A few additional tips:

1. Don't go for the obvious (check this out with your writing group), and don't be afraid to invoke difficult or painful experiences. Some of the most powerful moments in our development are quiet moments, easily passed by, tempting to forget.

2. Look for dissonance, what you don't understand, what's always puzzled you, what still feels uncomfortable. Try to get beyond the "normal" story of literacy-as-progression.

3. Don't trivialize your conclusions by summarizing your essay; you don't want to simplify the complex issues that you may be considering. What kind of experience do you want your readers to have as they move through your essay? What persona are you creating for yourself?

4. Start now. Start relying on your group and freewriting some ideas/responses.

5. Email me with questions or ideas.
Questions for Responding to a Draft

Keep this list of questions by your side as you’re reviewing your teammate’s draft—or your own. Please know that these questions are suggestions, ideas to help you think of positive, encouraging, truly helpful ways of responding. Responding does not mean criticizing—it means helping someone his/her their best work.

If you can answer these questions in terms of your teammate’s draft, you’ll improve drastically and quickly your ability to answer these questions in terms of your own draft. I promise. Keep this list with you as you write, revise, and respond. Write out your answers.

1. THE ASSIGNMENT: Does the draft carry out the assignment? What could the writer do to better fulfill the assignment?

2. THE TITLE AND INTRODUCTION: Does the title tell the reader what the draft is about? Does it catch the reader’s interest? How, exactly? What does the opening accomplish? How, exactly? How else might the writer begin?

3. THE Thesis AND PURPOSE: Paraphrase the thesis as a promise: “In this piece of writing, I will . . . .” Does the draft fulfill that promise? Why or why not? Does it fulfill the writer’s major purpose? How, exactly.

4. THE AUDIENCE: How does the draft capture the interest of and appeal to the intended audience?

5. THE RHETORICAL STANCE: Where does the writer stand on the issues involved in the topic? Is the writer an advocate or a critic? What words or phrases in the draft indicate the stance? Write them out. Where does the writer’s stance come from—that is, what influences have likely contributed to that stance?

6. THE SUPPORTING POINTS: List the main points, in order of presentation. Number them in order of interest to you. Review them one by one. Which of them could be explained more fully? less fully? Which should be eliminated? Which ones seem confusing or boring? Which ones make you want to know more? What evidence, examples, or details supports each of the main points?

7. THE ORGANIZATION: What kind of overall organization plan is used: spatial, chronological, logical, emphatic, or some other plan? If the points are not presented in the most useful order, what if anything might be moved? What suggestions can you make for transitions between paragraphs, that would make connections clearer and easier to follow?

8. THE PARAGRAPHS: Which paragraphs are clearest and most interesting to read? Why? Which ones are well developed? How are they so? Which paragraphs need further development? What kinds of information might help?

9. THE SENTENCES: Number each sentence. Then reread the draft, and choose three sentences you consider the most interesting or the best written—stylistically effective, entertaining, or otherwise memorable. Then choose three sentences you see as weak—confusing, awkward, or uninspired. How do the sentences vary in length? in structure? in openings? Document your answers.

10. THE WORDS: Circle words that are particularly effective, that draw vivid pictures or provoke strong responses. Then put squiggly lines under the words that are weak, vague, or unclear. Which words need to be defined? Which verbs are active or vivid? Are there any words that are potentially offensive to the intended audience or to anyone else?