The Free Minds Project

a course in the humanities

Fall 2013 Syllabus

REVISED

Theme: Who do we think we are?

NOTES: All readings are due on the date listed. This syllabus is just an overview. Please consult the individual subject syllabi for reading questions and unit descriptions.

A written reading response is due each class period.

Date	Subject	Reading Assignment Due
Monday, August 19	ALL FACULTY	**Sharing Our Intellectual Biographies** • Mike Rose, *Lives on the Boundary* (excerpt)
Thursday, August 22	ALL FACULTY	**Thinking As a Scholar: Five Perspectives on Benjamin Franklin** • Benjamin Franklin, "Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America"
Monday, August 26	PHILOSOPHY	**Thrasymachus' Challenge** • Plato, *Republic*, Book I
Thursday, August 29	PHILOSOPHY	**The City and the Soul** • Plato, *Republic,* Book II
Monday, September 2		NO CLASS — Enjoy your Labor Day
Thursday, September 5	WRITING	**Introduction to College Writing**
Monday, September 9	PHILOSOPHY	**Education and Character** • Plato, *Republic*, Book III
Thursday, September 12	PHILOSOPHY	**Time to Catch a Breath** • We'll use this class to catch our breath and to talk about writing a philosophical essay
Monday, September 16	PHILOSOPHY	**Wisdom, Courage, Moderation, and Justice** • Plato, *Republic*, Book IV
Thursday, September 19	WRITING	**How to Find an Argument and Examples** • Bring Plato's *Republic* and writing materials to class
Monday, September 23	PHILOSOPHY	**Men, Women, Children, Philosophers** • Plato, *Republic*, Book V
Thursday, September 26	WRITING	**How to Write a Paragraph** • *They Say/I Say,* pp. 95-95 and 98-99 • Bring Plato's *Republic* and writing materials to class
Monday, September 30	ANTHROPOLOGY	**The Captivity Narrative as an American Genre** • *Classic American Autobiographies: A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* **DUE: Essay, draft one**
Thursday, October 3	ANTHROPOLOGY	**Self-Making in the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin** • *Classic American Autobiographies: The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*
Monday, October 7	ANTHROPOLOGY	**Benjamin Franklin as an Exemplary American** • *Classic American Autobiographies: The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*

Thursday, October 10	ANTHROPOLOGY	**Freedom and Equality: A Narrative of Frederick Douglass** • *Classic American Autobiographies: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, American Slave*
Monday, October 14	ANTHROPOLOGY	**"Tradition" and "Progress" in the Writings of Zitkala-Ša** • *Classic American Autobiographies:* Zitkala-Ša (Gertrude Bonnin), see anthropology syllabus
Thursday, October 17	WRITING	**How to Use Quotations** • *They Say/I Say*, pp. 42-51, "The Art of Quoting" • Bring Plato's *Republic* and writing materials to class
Monday, October 21	ANTHROPOLOGY	**Contemporary Autobiographical Writing in Texas** • Richard Flores, "Memory-Place, Meaning, and the Alamo," handout
Thursday, October 24	LITERATURE	**Studying Shakespeare** • "Shakespeare's *Othello*" in *Othello*, pp. xliii-li
Monday, October 28	LITERATURE	**Reading Shakespeare** • *Othello,* Acts 1-3
Wednesday, October 30	LITERATURE	NOTE: Class moved from Thursday to Wednesday to allow you to enjoy Halloween. **Responding to Shakespeare** • *Othello,* Acts 4-5
Monday, November 4	LITERATURE	**Performing Shakespeare** • "Performing Shakespeare," handout **DUE: Essay, draft 2**
Thursday, November 7	LITERATURE	**Performance of *Othello* on the UT Campus with the Actors from the London Stage**
Monday, November 11	LITERATURE	**Interpreting Shakespeare** • "*Othello:* A Modern Perspective" in *Othello*, pp. 287-299
Thursday, November 14	WRITING	**How to Revise for Clarity and Focus** • *They Say/I Say*, pp. 108-112 • Bring Plato's *Republic* and writing materials to class
Monday, November 18	CREATIVE WRITING	**"Good Poems Are the Best Teachers"** • Ted Kooser, Chapter 1 • *Seagull Reader:* poems by Bishop, Collins, Hayden, and Komunyakaa **DUE: Essay, final draft**
Thursday, November 21	CREATIVE WRITING	**Image: Helping the Reader See** • Ted Kooser, Chapter 9 • *Seagull Reader:* poems by Forché, Frost, Hughes, Lee, and Williams
Monday, November 25	CREATIVE WRITING	**Who We Think We Are: Poems About the Self** • Ted Kooser, Chapter 8 • *Seagull Reader:* poems by Olds, Rich, Roethke, and Whitman • Nazim Hikmet, "Autobiography," handout
Thursday, November 28		**NO CLASS – Enjoy your Thanksgiving**

Monday, December 2	CREATIVE WRITING	**Line: How a Sentence Becomes Verse** • Ted Kooser, Chapter 4 • *Seagull Reader:* poems by Brooks, Clifton, Heaney, Hughes, and Williams
Thursday, December 5	CREATIVE WRITING	**Titles and Openings: Inviting the Reader In** • Ted Kooser, Chapter 3 • *Seagull Reader:* poems by Dove, Eliot, Hopkins, Owen, and Yeats
Monday, December 9	CREATIVE WRITING	**Revision: Seeing Again** • Ted Kooser, Chapter 6 and 10
Thursday, December 12	ALL	**End of Semester Reading and Celebration!!** Poetry portfolio due
No Class December 16 - January 9		

Free Minds: Philosophy
Fall 2013
Instructor: Matthew Daude Laurents

When people think of Western philosophy, they almost always think of Plato. In fact, Plato so dominates our philosophical landscape that Alfred North Whitehead (who was himself rather a good philosopher) characterized our philosophical tradition as a "series of footnotes to Plato." (*Process and Reality*) And when people think of Plato, the one work that is mentioned most frequently is the *Republic*. What's it all about?

To oversimplify greatly (*very* greatly), Plato's *Republic* is Socrates' exploration of the **ideal city** in pursuit of **justice**—that is, the city in which justice is perfectly realized. Along the way, we encounter some of the most influential ideas and arguments of our philosophical tradition—ideas that are still influencing us (and about which we still argue) today. That's why we Free Minds are spending our time together reading the *Republic*. We will read about half of the text in the fall, connecting Plato's concerns with major contemporary themes.

Date	**Topic/Reading**
Monday August 26	**Class 1: Thrasymachus' Challenge** Read: Introduction: **Read me first** (attached); Plato, *Republic*, Book I Focus: Thrasymachus' and Socrates' dispute, "final" round (348b to 354c) Reading Journal: What is Thrasymachus' challenge to Socrates? What, according to Thrasymachus, is justice? How does Socrates argue against Thrasymachus' view of virtue? Is Thrasymachus convinced by Socrates' arguments? Is Socrates convinced?
Thursday August 29	**Class 2: The City and the Soul** Read: *Republic*, Book II Focus: The Ring of Gyges (359c-361d) Focus: A Tale of Two Cities (369a to 374a) Reading Journal: Why does Socrates shift ground from the individual to the city? How does Socrates characterize the healthy city? What are its elements? What is the "luxurious city"? Is it "sick"? Who are the Guardians? What is the proper work of the Guardians of the city?
Monday September 9	**Class 3: Education and Character** Read: *Republic*, Book III (The discussion of the education of the Guardians runs from 376c in Book II.) Focus: What should children see? Focus: Sick, Healthy, Drugged (389b, and the Fable of the Metals, 414c-415e) Reading Journal: Why should we care how the Guardians are educated? Why must "music" be so carefully supervised? What will this supervision involve? Why is the use of falsehoods by the rulers permitted? Isn't this just what Thrasymachus says those in power will do?

Thursday September 12	**Class 4: Time to catch a breath** Overflow Workshop: writing a philosophy essay
Monday September 16	**Class 5: Wisdom, Courage, Moderation, and Justice** Read: *Republic*, Book IV (Plato begins the discussion of "living arrangements" at 415e.) Focus: The three classes and the tripartite soul (428b-434d) Focus: Health and disease: What is a "sick soul"? (444d) Reading Journal: What is Adeimantus' problem with respect to the happiness of the Guardians? How does Socrates respond? The city is complete: How do we find *justice* in the city? What is the relationship between the classes in the city and the "parts" of the soul? What *is* justice?
Monday September 23	**Class 6: Men, Women, Children, Philosophers** Read: *Republic*, Book V Focus: Sex and the City Reading Journal: What, according to Socrates, is the best arrangement between women and men in the city? Do women and men have different roles in the city? How could we transform existing cities into cities of the ideal type?

Free Minds Philosophy
Read me first

Let's get started by asking some basic questions about how we get started.

How do I read this stuff?

If you looked at philosophy textbook (Plato's *Republic*), you may have had some questions. A first sight, the *Republic* looks rather like a play, except that it would be an exceedingly boring play on stage. Nothing much happens after the first couple of pages except conversation—a very *long* conversation. So, the first thing you need to prepare yourself for digging in is a little orientation.

The *Republic* is not, in fact, a play, and it isn't a transcript of an actual conversation. Rather, it's a piece of *plausible fiction*—"plausible," because most of the people in the *Republic* probably existed and *could* have conversed in this way (if they had had enough stamina), but "fiction" because there's no reason to believe that this conversation took place in exactly this way. So, it's not a play, and it's not a "documentary."

So, what *is* the *Republic*? It's a philosophical exploration cast in the form of a dialogue among people. This form—*dialogue*—is really a literary device (rather like the sonnet or haiku or short story). The dialogue has been a favorite form for philosophical writing since at least Plato. The literary form is important, but it's also important to see that the "conversation" is really a literary device, with particular advantages (and disadvantages!).

But if the *Republic* is intended as a philosophical exploration of particular ideas, why pick to write in this form? Why not just say what was on his mind, for example? Think about it: What does Plato accomplish by writing in this form? (What can he do in this form that he can't so easily do in another form?)

Another important tool in your approach to Plato is how to find your place in the text (and how to cite it). Since Plato wrote in Greek, every translation into English has different page numbers. The *Republic* is divided into "books" (there are ten), but if I something like "Plato says in Book III that falsehood is a form of drug," you wouldn't be pleased that you had to sift through thirty-odd pages to find this particular point.

Fortunately, there's a convenient numbering system that philosophers use to refer to places in Plato's works irrespective of the translation. Here's the story: In 1578, Henri Estienne published a three-volume edition of Plato's works. Each page had two columns, one in Greek and one in Latin. The columns were divided into five chunks, each labeled with a letter of the alphabet from *a* to *e*.
Although the pages in each of the volumes were numbered continuously (like most books!), each volume starts over at 1a, so you need to give both a page number and a title to refer to a specific spot in a particular text. For instance, the famous Allegory of the Cave starts on volume 2, page 514 of Estienne's edition, in the chunk of the column (Greek or Latin, take your pick) labeled *a*. So, to give a citation to this spot in the *Republic*, we could write

Republic 514a

If you gave only the page number and column letter (as in "514a," without mentioning the title), you may be referring to volume 1 (near the end of a different dialogue, the *Gorgias*) or volume 2 (this passage from the *Republic*). Volume 3 had only 416 pages.

These numbers are known as "Stephanus numbers" because "Stephanus" is Latin for "Estienne"—which, incidentally, is French for "Stephen." Or we could say that Stephen is English for Stephanus, which is Latin for Estienne. See?

At any rate, the *Republic* starts at 327a and runs to 621d. Have a close look at your textbook: At the top of each right-hand page, you'll find a notation that tells you which book you're in and gives the range of Stephanus numbers for the two pages facing you. For instance, on page 187, you see this:

BOOK VII 514a-515d

So, we're in Book VII, and the text on 186 and 187 corresponds to 415a through 515d in the Estienne edition. One advantage of this system is that, although translations may vary, you can always tell someone where you are.

Great. How do I read this stuff?

Now that we have a few mechanical details out of the way, we're ready to dive in. So, dive in—but let me offer a few suggestions if you haven't read much philosophy.

First, mark the reading assignment in your book. Now try this: *Read all the words in order, from the start of the assignment to the end.* This isn't as easy as it sounds. We have a natural inclination to back up and try to figure out what's going on (especially when we're lost). Resist! One very good way to waste an enormous amount of time is stopping every sentence or two and backing up six sentences to figure out what's going on. Most people actually find it more efficient to read all the words, in order, because doing so will give you a *general* sense of what's going on in the text before you. Think of this process as a Google map of the reading assignment.

Once you have read all the words of the assignment in order, you're probably ready for stage two: fill in details by tracking main ideas. For instance, in Book I, Socrates and some old guy start a conversation about being an old guy. The old guy (Cephalus) ends up saying that being an old guy is pretty cool, if you have a reasonable amount of money, because then you can spend your last days being *just* to anyone you may have wronged. Socrates takes this as the cue for a philosophical investigation, and we're off: What do we *mean* by "just"? What's the proper *definition* of "justice"? So, if you notice that the philosophical exploration gets off the ground when Socrates and his buddies start investigating the nature of justice, then track what they say about **justice** in the rest of this assignment. This allows you to begin filling in details like this: The discussion takes a particularly interesting turn when Thrasymachus goes nuts on everybody and gives *his own* rather peculiar definition of "justice," that is, "the advantage of the stronger." Naturally, Socrates objects, and that's when the real fun starts.

The point of Suggestion Number One is that you don't want to try to get *details* on the first pass. Just get the overview—the "gist," as they say. As you look at the text again, things will be familiar, and your general idea of what's going on will serve as a framework for placing details in context. Ultimately, we want to work out the *arguments*. More on that later.

My second suggestion is: Relax. Reading philosophy is actually pretty hard at first, and it's not quite like reading in most disciplines. Don't become discouraged if you read a paragraph or a page (or six), and you have no idea what's going on—believe me, you are *not* alone. Keep reading! (Refer to Suggestion Number One.) Breathe normally.

Suggestion Number Three: I've read the *Republic* a few dozen times before, so I can help you through it. *But,* my help should not be a substitute for entering the text and confronting the arguments *yourself*. Think about it: If I just *told* you about a sonnet or a haiku, would you really have a sense of what *engaging* that poem would be like? Well, sort of—but in the same way that you'd get a *sense* of what Montréal or stir-fried squid are like if I just *told* you about them. So, the point here is that you *will* have to get face to face with Plato and sort these things out for yourself. It is *not* my intention to do your thinking for you, even though it may be frustrating.

However, I *will* give you some questions to ask Plato along the way. Have a look at the reading assignments. For each book, I give some major questions to ponder about that particular assignment. Don't overload yourself: Just think let these questions float around you as you read. (Refer to Suggestion Number One.)

Once you've read all the words in order and then read again to track main ideas, you're ready to write in your reading journal. Try to answer the reading journal questions using what you got from the reading. I'm not so interested in your writing down some of *Plato's* words; I'm interested in seeing how you are going to *explain* what Plato is up to. This is a fancy way of saying that you need to think for yourself, and it might be hard at first to find your way. Keep breathing, and keep reading (and thinking). Bring your reading journal responses to class! Your thoughts about these major themes in the reading will be our starting point for class discussion.

If you don't see anything remotely connected to any of the reading journal questions I'm asking, fine. At some point, I think you will. But meanwhile, reading is like any other sort of **conversation**: people shouldn't dislike you because you can't read their minds. (If they do, they probably aren't good conversation partners anyway.) But, why should you think that you can't get into a conversation with Plato just because he's dead? The *Republic* is an extraordinarily rich text, so there are lots of entry points other than mine. See Suggestion Number Two. Dive in, and we'll sort it all out together.

See you soon—happy philosophizing!

mmdl

Free Minds Project
Anthropology Unit, Fall 2013
Dr. Pauline Strong

Semester Theme: Who Do We Think We Are?

Course description: In this course we will consider the cultural construction of American identity as well as the cultural construction of otherness from an anthropological perspective. Our texts will be autobiographical writings from the late seventeenth through the twentieth centuries. In each case the author is recounting experiences that bring up issues that are central to American identity, including freedom, equality, progress, and self-invention. In addition to considering autobiographical texts, we will do some biographical and autobiographical writing in class.

Course Readings:

William L Andrews, *Classic American Autobiographies.* Penguin, 2003.

Richard R. Flores, "Memory-Place, Meaning, and the Alamo." *American Literary History,* Vol. 10, No. 3. (Autumn, 1998), pp. 428-445. (handout)

Course format: In each class we will discuss an autobiographical account, which you should read prior to coming to class. Please read the autobiography with the following questions in mind (these will be discussed during the first class session). Before each class session you should write a response to one or more of these questions in your journal.

- What is most important to the author? What are the author's values?
- What is the social role and positioning of the author? (This includes gender, class, age, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion.)
- How does the author construct his or her identity?
- What are key symbolic markers of the author's identity?
- Who does the author construct as significant influences? As significant "others"?
- How does the author express power relations? Resistance? Agency?
- How would you describe the author's "voice" in the text?
- How does the autobiography resonate, articulate, or contrast with your own experiences?

Anthropology Class 1: The Captivity Narrative as an American Genre
September 30, 2013

Reading: *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson,*[1682], In *Classic American Autobiographies,* pages 19-69.

Mary Rowlandson (c. 1637-1711) was a Puritan gentlewoman married to a Puritan minister. She lived in Massachusetts in the late seventeenth century. Mrs. Rowlandson was captured by local Indians at the beginning of a major war that came to be known as King Philip's War. When she returned to Massachusetts she narrated an account of her captivity to Rev. Increase Mather, who added a preface and published it. This was one of the first books published in New England, and one of the most popular. It established a genre of "captivity narratives" in which American identity is explored through the experiences of captives among Indians. Another famous captivity narrative is that of Capt. John Smith, retold recently in the Disney film, *Pocahontas.*

In class we will discuss the narrative as a text that reveals a great deal about Mary Rowlandson's culture, that of Puritan New England. *Who does Mary Rowlandson think she is?* We will also consider how she represents the "wilderness" and her Native American captors. *Where does Mary Rowlandson think she is? Who does she think her captors are?* How does Mary Rowlandson represent her differences from her captors? Are there also moments of identification? Can we see some of the same constructions of identity and otherness occurring in representations of Native Americans today?

Anthropology Class 2: Self-Making in the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin
October 3, 2013

Reading: *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin,* [1818], In *Classic American Autobiographies.* Franklin Parts 1 and 2 (selections to be announced).

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) was an author, printer, scientist, inventor, postmaster, diplomat, and a founding father of the United States. Largely self-educated, Franklin is often viewed as a classic self-made individual. He is well known for his discoveries involving electricity, and his inventions include the lightning rod, bifocals, the Franklin stove, the subscription library, and the "pro and con" form of decision-making. From 1733 to 1758 he published the popular *Poor Richard's Almanack,* which made him rich and is responsible for circulating many proverbs that are still known today ("a penny saved is twopence dear," "fish and visitors stink after three days"). Franklin was an important proponent of the unity of the American colonies and American independence, and helped to draft the Declaration of Independence. He promoted the philanthropic idea of "paying it forward." Influenced by his European travels, he became a prominent abolitionist at the end of his life, after freeing his slaves.

Franklin's memoirs were not published in his lifetime, and first appeared in 1791 in a French translation. They were first published in English in 1818 as an "autobiography," and since then have been highly acclaimed. Franklin's autobiography engages themes of common sense, vocation, moral virtues, success, and reconciling the needs and desires of the individual with those of society as a whole. It reveals the practical approach he takes to resolving social and ethical questions, for which he is known as one of the first and foremost American pragmatists. What does the autobiography reveal about *who Franklin thinks he is?* How does his way of recounting his experiences differ from Mary Rowlandson's? Do you see any significant similarities?

Anthropology Class 3: Benjamin Franklin as an Exemplary American
October 7, 2013

Reading: *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, [1818], In *Classic American Autobiographies.* Franklin Parts 3 and 4 (selections to be announced).

We will continue considering Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. For this session please think in particular about how his autobiography may have been influential in shaping our answer to our central question: *Who do we think we are?* What are our central values? What are the significant continuities and changes since Franklin's time in our answers to this question?

Anthropology Class 4: Freedom and Equality in the Slave Narrative of Frederick Douglass
October 10, 2013

Reading: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by* Himself [1845]. In *Classic American Autobiographies,* pp 229-327 (selections to be announced).

Frederick Douglass (c. 1818-1895) was an American abolitionist, orator, and author who started his life as a slave in Maryland. He escaped from slavery in 1838 and moved to Massachusetts, a center of abolitionist activity. His first autobiography, which we are reading, was a bestseller that was influential in the fight to end slavery. Douglass published additional autobiographies in 1855 and 1882. He was a central figure in struggles for emancipation, women's suffrage, and equal education.

Douglass's autobiography is a prominent example of an autobiographical genre known as slave narratives. There are obvious differences between "Indian captivity narratives" such as Rowlandson's, "memoirs" such as Franklin's, and "slave narratives" such as Douglass's, but there are continuities as well? What are these? How does Douglass define and pursue the central American values of freedom and equality? How is his narrative a challenge to those who would construe freedom and equality in more limited ways? *Who does Frederick Douglass think he is?*

Anthropology Class 5: "Tradition" and "Progress" in the Writings of Zitkala-Ša
October 14, 2013

Reading: Zitkala-Ša (Gertrude Bonnin),"Impressions of an Indian Childhood," "The School Days of an Indian Girl," "An Indian Teacher Among Indians," "Why I am a Pagan" [1900-1902].In *Classic American Autobiographies,* pp. 413-462.

Zitkala-Ša(1876-1938) was a Sioux Indian author, teacher, musician, and political activist. She spent her early years on the Yankton Sioux Indian Reservation in South Dakota, but was taken at the age of eight to a boarding school in Indiana. There she was given the name Gertrude Bonnin. She attended college at Earlham College in Indiana, highly unusual at the time for both women and Native Americans. She did not graduate, due to illness, but she went on to become a prominent member of a circle known as "Indian progressives." From 1900 on she published autobiographical writings in magazines such as *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's Monthly*, some of which we are reading. She later published Indian legends and political writings, and in 1926 she founded the National Council of American Indians in 1926 to lobby for Native American rights to citizenship.

Zitkala-Ša's autobiographical writings often focus on the tension between her tribal culture and modern life. Given this tension, exemplified perhaps in her two names, *who does Zitkala-Ša think she is?* What is central to her identity? How does she think about the American ideal of progress?

Anthropology Class 6: A Contemporary Mexican-American Autoethnography
October 14, 2013

Reading: Richard R. Flores, "Memory-Place, Meaning, and the Alamo." *American Literary History*, Vol. 10, No. 3. (Autumn, 1998), pp. 428-445. (Handout)

Richard Flores is an anthropologist who is currently Senior Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at The University of Texas at Austin. He is a native of San Antonio, Texas. He is one of a group of contemporary Mexican-American scholars who have focused their research on Mexican-American culture and history. The article we are reading is a short version of a topic he explores in his book, *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity, and the Master Symbol* (2002).

Flores's article is an example of what anthropologists' call "autoethnography," meaning that Flores begins by analyzing his own cultural experience—in this case his experience as a Mexican-American boy visiting the Alamo. From there he discuss the various meanings of the Alamo. *Who does Flores think he is?* Who do his classmates think he is? How do we use symbols like the Alamo to construct a sense of identity? How do we use symbols as forms of inclusion and exclusion?

Free Minds Project
Literature Unit Curriculum, Fall 2013
Dr. Patricia M. García

Semester Theme: Who do we think we are?

"All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances and one man in his time plays many parts."
Shakespeare, (English playwright, 1564-1616, quote from *As You Like It*)

"I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being."
Oscar Wilde (Irish Poet, Novelist, Dramatist and Critic, 1854-1900)

Who do we think we are? You may have heard another version of this question, possibly when you were acting brash or cocky: "who do you think you are?" Our version of this question shifts not only the tone, but also the agency, that is, the capacity of power of an individual to act. So, we as a class will explore our identity as we see ourselves first, and then we will consider how others see us. Ultimately, our readings, discussion, and the Free Minds Project will not only reflect who we are, but ask us whom we want to become.

In the opening act to *Othello*, Othello describes how he was invited by Desdemona's father to tell "the story of my life," a story that entertained the gentleman and intrigued and enchanted Desdemona. The "story of our lives" has two meanings as related to our semester's theme. The story may make us who we are, but we ultimately write our own stories. It is a constantly developing plot, one in which we struggle and, hopefully, succeed in controlling. The story of our lives also has many characters and many audiences, both of whom witness and contribute to the development of our identity.

At the start of the play, Othello is strong, confident, and controlled. By the end, Iago's manipulation has made Othello suspicious, insecure, and violent. How does such transformation happen? Who does Othello think he is? What do others think about him? How are these questions related? As we study this play, such questions will help us consider how literature depicts the human condition and, by witnessing these experiences, transforms the lives of its readers.

We will read Shakespeare to practice our close reading and critical thinking skills. We will view performances of the play, both film and theatrical, to compare their interpretationsto our own. Finally, we will act out scenes to illustrate our understanding of the play and consider how such performances might change our views.

Fall 2013 Syllabus

Class 1 (10/24): Studying Shakespeare

Things to consider before reading: Our edition of *Othello* is the very helpful Folger Shakespeare Library edition. The Folger Shakespeare Library, located in Washington, D. C., is one of the most important research centers in the world for Shakespeare scholars. For this first meeting, you will be reading the prefatory materials to the play in our book, probably the pages that many students skip! You will get some initial insight into *Othello* and learn about Shakespeare's life, theater, and language. Pay special attention to the section "Reading Shakespeare's Language" as it will prepare you for the nuts and bolts of reading the play itself.

Reading assignment: "Shakespeare's *Othello*"; pages xliii-li in *Othello* (Folger Shakespeare Library edition)

Discussion Questions (choose one):

1. Why do people read literature? Why do you think people read and study Shakespeare? What do you read (newspapers, magazines, and the web all count along with books), and what pleasure and/or information do you gain from your reading?
2. What experiences do you have reading or viewing one of Shakespeare's plays? What did you enjoy about the experience, and what did you find challenging or frustrating? If you don't have any, what expectations do you have for reading and studying this play? What concerns? Then, discuss one thing you learned from your reading that you think will be helpful for studying *Othello*.

Class 2(10/28): Reading Shakespeare

Things to consider before reading: In seventeenth-century England, a Moor was someone from North or West Africa and Muslim (although it is indicated in the play that Othello is Christian). It does not necessarily mean Othello was black, even though various characters—mostly those who do not like him such as Iago—describe him in racial stereotypes. Moors were, according to the stereotypes of the time and utilized in the original source material for the play, typically seen as evil, jealous, and lecherous. Shakespeare's Othello, however, is not any of these things, especially in the opening acts. So, consider how Othello, the tragic figure of the play, is heroic first and how that begins to change. Finally, remember that Othello is and remains an outsider to the court of Venice throughout the play because of his race. Look for instances in the text that show this attitude, even from those who admire Othello.

Reading assignment: *Othello*, Acts 1-3

Discussion questions (choose one):

1. What reasons does Iago give for hating Othello? What do such reasons reveal about Iago himself? Why do you think Shakespeare begins the play with characters speaking badly about Othello?
2. Tragedies are built centered around a heroic character who then falls from grace. In what ways is Othello heroic in these first three acts? By the end of act 3, would you still consider him a hero?

Class 3 (10/30): Responding to Shakespeare
PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS CLASS MEETING IS ON WEDNESDAY.

Things to consider before reading: Pay special attention to Desdemona as you finish the play. It might be helpful to look back at Act 1, scene 3 and Act 2, scene 1 to recall how strong Desdemona was in standing up to her father and how much in love she and Othello are. This will stand as a sharp contrast to the opening scenes of Act 4 and, of course, to the conclusion. What drew her to Othello, and how does she maintain her love for him throughout the play, even in her final moments?

Reading assignment: *Othello*, Acts 4-5

Discussion questions (choose one):

1. Find a quote by Desdemona that demonstrates her self-confidence and explain its meaning. Whom is she speaking to in this scene, and what is the context for her statement? How do the other characters in the scene react to her, and what might this reveal about their feelings towards Desdemona?
2. How would you describe the other important woman in the play, Emilia, and her relationship with Desdemona? With Iago? With Othello?

Class 4 (11/4): Performing Shakespeare

Things to consider before reading: Our guest lecture tonight with be given by Clayton Stromberger, a member of the UT Department of English's Shakespeare at Winedale program. He will be speaking to us about performing Shakespeare in preparation for our viewing of the AFTLS performance at our next session. Here's some information about the Winedale program from their website (http://www.utexas.edu/cola/progs/winedale/):

> Established in 1970 as a UT English course, Shakespeare at Winedale has grown into a year-round program reaching many different groups. Students in the summer program spend two months in the Texas countryside, studying and performing three plays in the converted nineteenth-century barn that is our theatre. A spring semester version of the course is offered on the UT campus, with performances at Winedale. Camp Shakespeare provides a two-week experience of learning and playing Shakespeare for 10-16 year-olds. Our Outreach program brings Shakespeare into the classrooms of elementary school students throughout central Texas, and brings those students to Winedale to perform. Our program also includes a medieval nativity play performed by children from the Winedale area, a summer course for teachers through the UTeach program, visits by British Shakespeareans to the Winedale theatre barn, and special performances in other venues, including an annual tour to England.

Reading assignment: Handout on "Performing Shakespeare."

Discussion questions (choose one):

1. If you were casting a film version of *Othello* today, who would you choose to play the major roles and why? What might this tell you about the qualities of each character?
2. If you could play any of the characters in *Othello*, who would it be and why?

Class 5 (11/7): Actors from the London Stage present *Othello*

Things to consider before seeing the play: The Actors from the London Stage is a professional theater troupe that will be performing *Othello*. Here is some information on the group from the UT website (http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/english/shakespeare-studies/AFTLS.php):

> Actors from the London Stage, now housed at the University of Notre Dame, is an educational and theatrical program that brings a troupe of five classically trained actors from major English theatres to college campuses for week-long residencies. During their week at the University of Texas, the actors teach approximately 30 classes and workshops and perform minimalist productions of a full-length Shakespeare play – three times at UT and once at Winedale. Begun in 1975 by Professor Homer Swander of the University of California, Santa Barbara and Patrick Stewart, the British actor, AFTLS's unique program of performance and education has had approximately 350 residences on 150 campuses, including UT Austin in 1979, 1983, and 1999 to present.
>
> The London actors explore the relationship of page and stage, language and meaning: "rehearsing" students in scenes from Shakespeare and other playwrights, helping them to examine the many ways scenes can be understood and performed, leading them in analyzing and speaking verse, teaching them about metrical stresses and rhythm, cues, blocking, stage breathing, and the like. The actors work with English and drama majors; students in foreign languages, communications, speech, music, history, classics, psychology; as well as with high schoolers and members of the community. Their one-actor shows have been performed in residence halls and retirement communities, in auditoria and open areas, in coffee houses and student unions.

Reading assignment: None!

Discussion questions: None!

Class 6 (11/11): Interpreting Shakespeare

Things to consider before reading: This is a scholar's perspective on the play's tragedy, and you'll need to look for her arguments among the many examples from the play she provides. More importantly, consider your own understanding of the play, especially why you think Othello falls victim to Iago's plotting. Then, when you read the article, you can compare your own theories and opinions to that of the author. When you read the opinions of experts, called secondary sources in the academic world, you should consider how they confirm or challenge your own views on the subject. Remember, your opinion counts!

Reading Assignment: "*Othello*: A Modern Perspective" by Susan Snyder, pages 287-299.

Discussion questions (choose 1):

1. What expectations did you have for the AFTLS performance, and how were they met? What surprised you about the performance? How did viewing a live performance of the play help your understanding and appreciation of it?

2. In your opinion, is this play more about race or gender? Which of Snyder's arguments in this essay support your view? How does Snyder's essay help your understanding and appreciation of *Othello*?

Free Minds Project
Creative Writing
Fall 2013
Instructor: Vivé Griffith

About the Unit

Who do we think we are? That question drives our inquiry this semester, and by the time we reach the creative writing unit in November, we'll have explored it through Plato's *Republic*, autobiographical texts, and Shakespeare. Here at the close of the semester we will see how poets tackle that question, one that is clearly at the center of poetry at its oldest and most recent.

The first poems we know of are the great epics, poems like *The Odyssey* that try to capture the essence of a culture and a people. They were created to be sung, and the rhythm and rhyme we know think of as essential to poetry were part of the song. Those musical qualities also served as mnemonic devices, enabling the bard to remember what to sing. (This still happens today. Think of how you can remember the lyrics of a song you haven't heard in many years.) But the epic poems also answered the question, *Who do we think we are?*on a large scale.

Contemporary poetry tends to focus less on the larger questions of cultural identity and more on individual identity. Poems are more likely to explore the self, the family, and the local. Yet they are still the places we grapple with identity, with expressing the human experience on paper. In this unit, we'll look at how poets do that, and then we'll work on doing it ourselves. We'll be driven by craft, exploring what I like to call the "tools of the trade." We'll discover *how* poets create their poems, and we'll let them guide us into creating our own.

About the Texts

The first text for this semester's creative writing unit comes from a former poet laureate. The poet laureate is the poet appointed by the Library of Congress to be the official national poet. His or her primary job is to promote poetry in the country, and each poet laureate approaches that task in a different way The current poet laureate is Natasha Trethewey.

Ted Kooser (born 1939), author of *The Poetry Repair Manual*, was poet laureate from 2004-06. He is known for his plain spoken, accessible writing, often about rural themes. He was raised in Iowa and has lived most of his adult life in Nebraska. We read *The Poetry Repair Manual* to help us approach poetry as writers and not just readers. He reminds us that at its core poetry is about communication, and the better we communicate in a poem, the more likely we are to reach other people and make them feel.

The second text for the unit is *The Seagull Reader: Poems*, an anthology of poems ranging from the Renaissance to the present from some very important poets and even cultural figures like Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen.

In the syllabus, you'll find the following abbreviations: TK =Ted Kooser, *The Poetry Home Repair Manual;* SG = *Seagull Reader: Poems*

Class 1
"Good poems are the best teachers." –Mary Oliver
Monday, November 18

What makes it a poem? Is it a poem simply because of the line breaks? Or is there another thing that makes something considered a poem instead of, say, a story or an essay?

What makes someone a poet? Does simply writing a poem make a poet, or are there other things that go into deserving the title? (Is it a title?)

In the poetry unit, we'll play with these questions, looking at a number of poems to determine what holds them together as a genre and considering the act of writing them.

Today we'll talk about poems by exploring some good ones, and we'll consider what Ted Kooser calls "the poet's job description."

READ:
TK: Chapter 1 (Chapter 2 optional but recommended)
SR:

- Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art"
- Billy Collins, "Introduction to Poetry"
- Robert Hayden, "Those Winter Sundays"
- YusefKomunyakaa, "Facing It"

WRITE:
For your first assignment, we will work on a poem in class. Please come to class having read the assignment and prepared to jump into poetry around our table.

Class 2
Image: Helping the Reader See
Thursday, November 21

From *The Poetry Dictionary* by John Drury:

Image, Imagery*(ím-idge; Latin, "likeness, semblance, picture, concept, imitation or copy")* A mental picture; a concrete representation of something; a likeness the senses can perceive.

Ezra Pound says that an image "presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." A poetic image transfers itself to our minds with a flash, as if projected upon a movie screen. Many images, such as "bracelet in a wheel barrow," appeal primarily to the sense of sight. But an image can invoke the other senses too, as in "a sniff of perfume," or a "jangling of banjoes," or a "scratchy blanket," or a "tart cherry." Images serve as the poem's evidence.

Poetry without images, or with too few, seems vacant, generalized, uncompelling. But stale images are no substitute for the real thing, which must hit us as a discovery, however small. …

Two related ideas – image and details-- are critical to poetry. They act as counter to abstraction—ideas separated from the concrete like "liberty" and "harmony." Today we'll read poems that are rooted in concrete image, painting a vivid picture for the reader. Often, there will be a great deal of emotion in these poems, but the poems don't talk about emotion. They create emotion by precisely describing something to which we have an emotional reaction.

When reading the poems in today's assignment, pay very close attention to how they use image. You might underline specific images as you read.

READ:
TK: Chapter 9
SR:

- Carolyn Forché, "The Colonel"
- Robert Frost, "Birches"
- Langston Hughes, "Harlem"
- Li-Young Lee, "Eating Alone" and "Eating Together"
- William Carlos Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow"

WRITE:
(This assignment comes from *Creating Poetry* by John Drury.) Think of an abstraction. Remember, an abstraction is an idea, often a grand idea, that is removed from the thing itself. Some abstractions you might use are *liberty, love, hope, mortality, peace, pain, patriotism*. Use one of these or come up with another.

Now, write a poem about that abstraction that is entirely concrete. Make it full of sensory details and specific images (like a burst piñata, a sunrise over the marsh, etc.). You may use the abstraction in the title, but do not use it or any other abstraction in the poem itself. If you choose to write about mortality, for example, you might describe an incident when, as a child, you found a dying cardinal beside a tool shed. Get specific. Use examples. Make your poem 10-30 lines, and go with free verse, not rhyme.

Class 3
Who We Think We Are: Poems About the Self
Monday, November 25

Poets today often plumb their personal experience to find material for poems. This, however, doesn't mean that the poems exist simply to be therapeutic. We relate to each other through personal experience, and the best poems resonate for us because what they are revealing is relevant not just for the poet, but for the reader too. Look for that familiarity in the poems you read for tonight.

READ:
TK: Chapter 8
SR:

- Sharon Olds, "I Go Back to May, 1937"
- Adrienne Rich, "Diving Into the Wreck"
- Theodore Roethke, "My Papa's Waltz"

- Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," sections 1 and 2

Handout: NazimHikmet, "Autobiography"

WRITE:

Notice the way the poets we read for today bring stories of their own lives into their poems, and the way they strive to be universal while doing so. When we write about ourselves, we explore who we are.

For today, write a poem based on Nazim Hikmet's poem "Autobiography." Title your poem "Autobiography" and make sure that, like Hikmet, you include names and places, and very specific, concrete details. And remember, each of our lives is far larger than what can be contained in a single poem, writing an autobiography requires that you *choose* your details with care. Learning to choose the right details or image or metaphor is key to every poem you write.

Class 4
Line: How a Sentence Becomes Verse
Monday, December 2

The most obvious difference between prose and poetry is that poetry is written in lines. Tonight we look at the form of a poem—how it breaks down into lines and then stanzas. We'll do an exercise that'll help us think about the decisions a poet makes in breaking a poem into smaller parts, and we'll discuss the ways in which the poems we read for tonight are structured.

The poems you'll read include more formal pieces that use strict conventions of rhythm and rhyme and what we call "free verse," where no set rhythm or rhyme is used. Which do you prefer? Why?

READ:

TK: Chapter 4

SG:

- Gwendolyn Brooks, "We Real Cool"
- Lucille Clifton, "Homage To My Hips"
- Seamus Heaney, "Digging"
- Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"
- William CarlosWilliams, "The Red Wheelbarrow"

WRITE:

Write a poem about any subject you're interested in. Try, in this case, to choose something a bit external to the self. You might choose a place you've been, a person you know, an experience like attending a concert or spending a holiday with people you don't like. Be playful and expansive in choosing what to write about.

Now, play with the poem with short lines and long lines, several stanzas or one stanza. When you find a structure that seems to work best, think about why. Turn in the poem as you finally chose to structure it and at least one earlier verson of the poem, plus 2-3 sentences explaining why you chose to shape the poem the way you did.

Class 5
Titles and Openings: Inviting the Reader In
Thursday, December 5

How do we make someone care about our poem? How do we draw someone in and get them to keep reading? How do we decide where to begin?

All of these questions sit at the core of the writing experience, and they can either halt us from writing or make us dive in. Today we'll look at how a number poems to help us determine how a good poem invites the reader in. As you read, consider:

- Does the title intrigue me? Why or why not?
- How does the title relate to the rest of the poem?
- How does the poet invite the reader in?
- What clues do we get that the writer is aware of his or her reader? In other words, how do we know that he or she has considered the audience?

READ:
TK: Chapter 3
SR:

- Rita Dove, "Daystar"
- T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"
- Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur"
- Wilfred Owen, "Dulce Et Decorum Est"
- W.B. Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree"

WRITE:

The poems we're reading today deal with a series of topics – a woman's experience, a fictional character's story of aging, religious revelation, war, and a peaceful place. Choose one of these topics and write your own poem. In other words, you can write about womanhood/manhood, aging, God, war, or place. However, because many of those are big, big topics, I suggest you try to stay small. Let the poems you read for today guide you.

Your poem should be at least 10 lines long and contain a thoughtful title and opening.

Class 6
Revision: Seeing Again
Monday, December 9

"I have never thought of myself as a good writer. But I'm one of the world's great rewriters." **James A. Michener**

**

Interviewer: How much rewriting do you do?
Hemingway: It depends. I rewrote the ending of *Farewell to Arms*, the last page of it, 39 times before I was satisfied.
Interviewer: Was there some technical problem there? What was it that had stumped you?
Hemingway: Getting the words right.

(**Ernest Hemingway**, "The Art of Fiction," *The Paris Review*, 1956)

Revision is literally and figuratively the act of "seeing again" or, as Natalie Goldberg says, "envisioning again." We are asked to remember that writing is a process and that pieces evolve over time. We must see our work in a new light and rework it to bring it closer to completion.

All writers revise, and the best writers revise a lot. The short story writer Raymond Carver wrote 20 to 30 drafts of his stories before he was satisfied. "It's something I love to do," he said, "putting words in and taking words out."

Today we will explore the act of revision and work through exercises to help revise the five (or more) poems we've written this semester. Try to approach revision with an openness to the idea that the finished poem may look very different from the one you started with.

READ:
TK: Chapter 6 and 10

WRITE:
Read through the five poems you've written during this unit. Look at and consider my comments on your poems. Then start revising. Mark out words that aren't working, add lines or stanzas as needed. Then make a list of at least three additional revisions you believe each poem needs. Bring those to class with you. We'll work on them together.

For our very last class of the semester, you will read aloud from your writing for the semester and turn in a portfolio of poems.