



Fall 2021 Syllabus  
Overview

**Theme: Voices at the threshold: How do we express the spaces between?**

NOTES: All readings are due on the date listed. Please consult the detailed syllabus for unit descriptions and reading and discussion questions, as well as writing assignments.

This class meets Monday and Thursday evenings from 6:30-8:30 pm using Zoom. Use the link below to access class meetings:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83653650074?pwd=WG1Md29pK0dnOXBlbHNWb3o0SW5pQT09>

Date	Professor	Reading Assignment Due
Thursday, August 19		<b>Orientation</b>
Monday, August 23	ALL FACULTY	<a href="#"><u>Breaking the Silence: Meeting Each Other as Thinkers</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action"</li></ul>
Thursday, August 26	Vivé Griffith/ALL FACULTY	<a href="#"><u>Eating a Guava: Meeting Each Other as Classmates and Community Members</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Esmerelda Santiago, "How to Eat a Guava"</li></ul>
Monday, August 30	Pat García	<a href="#"><u>Characters and Setting</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Oscar Cásares, <i>Where We Come From</i>: Prologue through Chapter 7</li><li><b>Response Paper 1 Due</b></li></ul>
Thursday, September 2	A.R. Rogers	<a href="#"><u>Using Your Voice in Academic Writing</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>They Say, I Say</i>, "You Mean I Can Just Say It That Way?": Academic Writing Doesn't Mean Setting Aside Your Own Voice</li><li><i>EasyWriter</i>, Reading and Listening Analytically, Critically, and Respectfully</li></ul>
Monday, September 6	NO CLASS	<b>Happy Labor Day – <a href="#"><u>no class</u></a> tonight!</b>
Thursday, September 9	Pat García	<a href="#"><u>Plot and Conflict</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Oscar Cásares, <i>Where We Come From</i>: Chapters 8-21</li></ul>
Monday, September 13	Pat García	<a href="#"><u>Themes and Contexts</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Oscar Cásares, <i>Where We Come From</i>: Chapter 22 through end</li><li><b>Response Paper 2 Due</b></li></ul>
Thursday, September 16	A.R. Rogers	<a href="#"><u>Writing About Literature</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>They Say, I Say</i>, "On Closer Examination": Entering Conversations about Literature, pgs. 187-204;</li></ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>EasyWriter</i>, Exploring, Planning, and Drafting, pgs. 10-16</li> <li>• <b>One page draft of formal paper 1 DUE</b></li> </ul>
Monday, September 20	Pat García	<a href="#">Oscar Cásares Author Visit</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review Cásares' website</li> <li>• Oscar Cásares, "A Child Doesn't Cry in Spanish or English"</li> <li>• Reyna Grande, "A Migrant's Story"</li> <li>• <b>Response Paper 3 Due</b></li> </ul>
Thursday, September 23	Pat García	<a href="#">Shakespeare I</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• William Shakespeare, <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>: Act 1, Scene 5; Act 2, Scene 2; Act 3, Scene 5 (course reader or online)</li> </ul> <b>***Formal Paper 1 Due***</b>
Monday, September 27	Pat García	<a href="#">Shakespeare II</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch a film production of <i>Romeo and Juliet</i></li> <li>• <b>Response Paper 4 Due</b></li> </ul>
Thursday, September 30	A.R. Rogers	<a href="#">Appealing to Readers</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>They Say, I Say</i>, "So What? Who Cares?": Saying Why It Matters</li> <li>• <i>EasyWriter</i>, Arguing Ethically and Persuasively</li> </ul>
Tuesday, October 5	ALL	<a href="#">Controversy and Conversation</a> <i>Reckoning in Boston</i> screening and panel discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• see detailed syllabus for information about attending screening through UT Austin's Humanities Institute</li> </ul> <b>Note: class is moved from Monday to Tuesday this week</b>
Thursday, October 7	ALL	<a href="#">A Reckoning at Home</a>
Monday, October 11	Janis Bergman-Carton	<a href="#">Analyzing Art about Migration and Immigration</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Art about Migration" (PBS web series, 2019)</li> <li>• <b>Response Paper 5 Due</b></li> </ul>
Thursday, October 14	Janis Bergman-Carton	<a href="#">Jacob Lawrence: he Black Migration into American Art</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jacob Lawrence, "The Great Migration: An American Story"</li> <li>• Jacob Lawrence, The Migration Series (Khan Academy)</li> </ul>
Monday, October 18	Janis Bergman-Carton	<a href="#">Can Art Transcend National and Cultural Borders?</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bisa Butler: Portraits   Exhibition Stories, 2020 (The Art Institute of Chicago)</li> <li>• <b>Response Paper 6 Due</b></li> </ul>
Thursday, October 21	Janis Bergman-Carton	<a href="#">What is Border Art?</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Watch:</b> Colores: Luis Jiménez (PBS 2015)</li> <li>• <b>Watch:</b> Erasing The U.S. -Mexico Border With Art LatiNation, 201</li> </ul>
Monday, October 25	A.R. Rogers	<a href="#">How to Disagree</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>They Say, I Say</i>, "Yes / No / Okay, But": Three Ways to Respond</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>EasyWriter</i>, Reviewing, Revising, and Editing</li> <li>• <b>One page draft of formal paper 2 DUE</b></li> </ul>
Thursday, October 28	A.R. Rogers	<a href="#"><u>The Art of Quoting and Summarizing</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>They Say, I Say</i>, “Her Point Is”: The Art of Summarizing, pgs 30-42</li> <li>• <i>They Say, I Say</i>, “As He Himself Puts It”: The Art of Quoting</li> <li>• <i>EasyWriter</i>, Top Twenty Tips for Editing Your Writing</li> </ul>
Monday, November 1	Matthew Daude Laurents	<a href="#"><u>What is Philosophy?</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matthew Daude Laurents “What is philosophy?”</li> <li>• Ortega y Gasset, excerpt from <i>What is Philosophy?</i></li> <li>• selected poems</li> <li>• <b>Response Paper 7 Due</b></li> </ul>
Thursday, November 4	Matthew Daude Laurents	<a href="#"><u>Reality Part 1</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matthew Daude Laurents: “Reality is a Real Problem”</li> <li>• Selected poems</li> </ul> <p>***<b>Formal Paper 2 Due</b>***</p>
Monday, November 8		<b>No class tonight due to weekend Blanton Museum of Art visit.</b>
Thursday, November 11	Janis Bergman-Carton	<a href="#"><u>Cross-cultural Representations of the Human Body and Notions of Beauty</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Naturalism, Realism, Abstraction, and Idealization”</li> <li>• Representations of the Body in Western Culture</li> <li>• “Must Art Be Artful?”</li> </ul>
Saturday, November 13	Janis Bergman-Carton	<a href="#"><u>Visit to the Blanton Art Museum</u></a>
Monday, November 15	Matthew Daude Laurents	<a href="#"><u>Reality Part 2</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matthew Daude Laurents, “Thales”</li> <li>• Parmenides, excerpts</li> <li>• <b>Response Paper 8 Due</b></li> </ul>
Thursday, November 18	Matthew Daude Laurents	<a href="#"><u>Knowledge</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matthew Daude Laurents. “How do I know?”</li> <li>• Selected poems</li> </ul>
Monday, November 22	Matthew Daude Laurents	<a href="#"><u>Value</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matthew Daude Laurents. <i>Introducing the Mexica</i></li> <li>• Selected poems</li> <li>• <b>Response Paper 9 Due</b></li> </ul>
Thursday, November 25	NO CLASS	<b>Enjoy your Thanksgiving!</b>
Monday, November 29	Vivé Griffith	<a href="#"><u>Walt Whitman and the Search for a Poetry of Democracy</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walt Whitman, “Introduction”</li> <li>• Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself” excerpts</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>see detailed syllabus/assignment sheet for writing assignment</li> </ul>
Thursday, December 2	Vivé Griffith	<u><a href="#">Image and Detail: Helping the Reader See</a></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Penguin Anthology</i> - Poems by Hayden, Hughes, Nye, Soto, Tretheway, Williams</li> <li>see detailed syllabus for writing assignment</li> </ul>
Monday, December 6	Vivé Griffith	<u><a href="#">Structuring a Poem</a></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Penguin Anthology</i> - Poems by Bishop, Brooks, Harjo, Hayes, Howe, Hughes, and Wright</li> <li>see detailed syllabus for writing assignment</li> </ul>
Thursday, December 9	Vivé Griffith	<u><a href="#">Voice: How Poems Sound</a></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Penguin Anthology</i> - Poems by Clifton, Dove, Komunyakaa, O'Hara, Olds, Oliver, and Sanchez</li> <li>see detailed syllabus for writing assignment</li> </ul>
Monday, December 13	Vivé Griffith	<u><a href="#">Capturing the Moment in Poems</a></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poems by Brown, Larkin, Alexander, Blanco, and Gorman (course reader)</li> <li>see detailed syllabus for writing assignment</li> </ul>
Thursday, December 16	ALL FACULTY	<u><a href="#">Celebration and Sharing</a></u>  <b>**Final portfolio due**</b>

**You did it! Congratulations on all of your hard work!**

## **ANALYTIC WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

For each Monday class in the literature, art history, and philosophy units, you will turn in an informal **response paper** in answer to a question posed in the syllabus. Response papers should be roughly one page, double-spaced, typed. These papers serve to lay the groundwork for productive in-class discussions, as well as a place to practice writing skills.

You will also be asked to turn in **two formal papers** during the semester. An assignment sheet for each paper will be provided.

Together, all of your writing will become your "portfolio," a record of the work you have done in the class. Please **be sure not to throw away any of your writing** from the class until after you have completed the program.

All written assignments should be submitted to your student dropbox **on the due date before the start of class**. Each paper should be titled using this format: **FM response paper # date**. For example: **FM RP #1 8/26**. (I abbreviated "response paper" as "RP"; you may also abbreviate a formal paper as "FP"). If you are experiencing technical difficulty uploading your work to the student dropbox, please email it to A.R. Rogers at [poetofwhat@gmail.com](mailto:poetofwhat@gmail.com).

## Response Papers:

The goal of these responses is to help you grapple with the texts. Through writing, you might find your understanding of assigned readings improves, or that you are left with confusion or questions that others may have as well. Either way, response papers lay the groundwork for our productive in-class discussions, and serve as a great place to practice writing skills.

### Grading:

- In total, reading response papers will constitute **20% of your grade**.
- You will be assigned 9 response papers, each graded on a 10-pt scale.
- Your lowest response paper grade will be dropped at the end of the semester.
- Late papers will earn a maximum of half credit. *Note: Response papers WILL NOT be accepted more than one class period after the original due date.*

## Formal Papers:

You will hand in two short formal papers this semester, each about two pages long (roughly 500 words). These papers will respond to the work you're doing in the literature and art history units. Your first formal paper will explore Oscar Cásares's novel *Where We Come From*; in the second paper, you'll explore the work and artists that we are discussing in the art history unit. To help you prepare for formal papers, you will receive detailed guidelines.

### Grading:

- In total, formal papers will constitute **35% of your grade**. (Formal Papers 1 – 15%, Formal Papers 2 - 20%)
- You will be provided guidelines in the form of an assignment sheet, and a grading rubric.
- Each formal paper grade is made up of both process (i.e. the submission of timely and complete drafts) and product (the quality of your final work), so it is very important to keep up with deadlines.

**NOTE:** You will also have several creative writing assignments this semester. These assignments are listed in the creative writing portion of the syllabus and will be evaluated by Vivé Griffith.

## DETAILED SYLLABUS

Always read this section before preparing for class

Monday, August 23

### Breaking the Silence: Meeting Each Other as Thinkers

See [week 1 assignment sheet](#) for details.

Thursday, August 26

### Eating the Guava: Meeting Each Other as Classmates and Community Members

See [week 1 assignment sheet](#) for details.

Monday, August 30

### Literature Unit with Dr. Patricia García

**Unit Overview:** We will be reading Brownsville-native and UT professor Oscar Cásares' novel *Where We Come From* (2019). The novel tells the story of Nina, a woman living on the border, who cares for her aging mother and watches her adolescent nephew one hot summer. When Nina's maid asks her do "un favor," Nina reluctantly becomes involved in human smuggling and learns that her life in the border is not so isolated from the bigger questions of immigration, nor is it as lonely as she imagined it to be. The novel will allow us to engage in a discussion of politics and family, especially when we consider the stories behind the new headlines. We are fortunate that Oscar Cásares will join us for a book chat as well this semester, so we can ask him questions about the novel, writing, and border life.

### Literature Class 1: Characters and Setting

**Background:** The novel is divided into sections, and we will be looking at the opening three sections: the Prologue titled "Los Rules," Section 1 "Un Camino," and Section 2 "Un Favor." We'll focus on two important aspects of the novel: setting and character. How does the use of English, Spanish and Tex-Mex or Spanglish help create the setting? How does he describe the landscape of the border? As you read, consider how Cásares introduces us to Nina. What do we learn about her, now and in the past? How does she view others, and how do other characters view her?

**Read:** *Where We Come From*, the prologue through Chapter 7.

**Response paper prompt:** How would you describe Nina? Choose one character trait, and support this assertion using at least one quote to support your answer. What do you like about Nina? What frustrates you about Nina? How might these reactions as a reader be related to this character trait?

Thursday, September 2

**Analytic Writing with A.R. Rogers, MFA**  
**Analytic Writing Class 1: Using Your Voice in Academic Writing**

**Background:** It's my hope that you come to understand that being a successful writer doesn't mean that you learn to use a voice that isn't yours, but a more clarified version of your own voice. I encounter many students that have built a protective wall they carry with them into writing and English classes because they've previously (directly or indirectly) been harmed by previous instructors. Our language, how we speak and write, are intrinsic to who we are and have been shaped by our experiences: our language is a part of us, so it hurts when it's criticized. One tool we have for navigating these waters is code-meshing, or the practice of blending our local and cultural language practices with more formal elements of language. This is something most of us do naturally, but can we do this in academic writing, as well?

**Read:**

- *They Say, I Say*, Chapter 9, "You Mean I Can Just Say It That Way?": Academic Writing Doesn't Mean Setting Aside Your Own Voice, pgs 117-130;
- *EasyWriter*, Reading and Listening Analytically, Critically, and Respectfully, pgs 46-53

**Note – students in this class may have different editions of our two writing texts, *They Say, I Say* and *EasyWriter*. If your page numbers do not match those listed here, please use chapter titles as a guide for what to read.**

**Discuss:** For our first full class together, we'll talk about entering the academic conversation and what that even means! We'll work through a couple of writing exercises wherein we practice experimenting with different "voices" (ex. 1 on pg 130) and audiences ("text message" exercise).

Monday, September 6

**We will not meet for class on this night in observance of the Labor Day holiday.**

Thursday, September 9

**Literature Class 2: Plot and Conflict**

**Background:** As we continue the novel, we can see how Cásares uses plot structure in ways that might be familiar as well as some more innovative methods. Beside the conflict that Nina faces in hiding Daniel from authorities and from her family, what other conflicts does she face, especially her internal ones? What larger political and social issues underlie the novel's themes? Pay special attention to the "inter-stories" throughout the novel: those italicized sections that tell a brief story about a minor character. What role do they have in the overall narrative of the novel? What conflicts do they show, especially as related to the novel's larger themes?

**Read:** *Where We Come From*, Part 3 "La Madrina" Chapters 8-21.

**Discussion Question:** Choose one “inter-story” to look at in closer detail. How does Cásares develop the character in this story through the use of setting, language, and description? How does this story help us understand Nina’s, Orly’s, or Daniel’s story in new ways?

Monday, September 13

### Literature Class 3: Themes and Contexts

**Background:** Even though I am writing this paragraph before we’ve even met and discussed the novel, I’m guessing many of you are making personal connections to it for a variety of reasons. Perhaps you know the border area or have experiences with immigration; you have been a caregiver for an elderly parent; or you remember how confusing it was to be an adolescent. How do our roles as readers provide a context for understanding the larger themes in the novel? How does Cásares keep our attention throughout the novel by speaking to these experiences?

**Readings:** *Where We Come From*: Part 4 “Chivito” Chapter 22 through end.

**Response paper:** A great novel answers some questions for us and leaves us with others. For example, will Daniel safely return to his father? What will Nina do next? How will Orly feel about returning to Houston, and will he share his experiences?

**Choose any one of the above questions and try to answer it in a way that lets you imagine what the character does next.** However you answer the question, please make a reference to one quote from the book that gives you some insight to your character’s personality and support his/her actions in your answer.

Thursday, September 16

### Analytic Writing Class 2: Writing About Literature

**Background:** Writing is, above all, a process. Nothing you’ve ever read in print began the way you encounter it on the page (including what you’re reading right now). Whether it’s a novel, a poem, or a textbook, that piece of writing moved through many iterations before it came to take its final, polished form. Many new writers often want to rush through or past the writing process, but there’s so much to be had in those initial stages of exploring, planning, and even a bit of daydreaming about your topic! When we wait until the night before to begin writing a paper, as Audre Lorde says, “we rob ourselves of ourselves and each other.” What if I asked you to make a table, but gave you no time to think and plan about how you would accomplish this?

**Read:**

- *They Say, I Say*, “On Closer Examination”: Entering Conversations about Literature, pgs. 187-204;
- *EasyWriter*, Exploring, Planning, and Drafting, pgs. 10-16

**Discuss:** As we move closer to the due date for your first paper, we’ll discuss the *They Say, I Say* chapter on writing about and responding to literature, particularly identifying conflict within the work and supporting your claims about the text with textual evidence.



Concerning the nuts and bolts of writing, we'll begin the discussion about thesis statements: what are they and what elements do successful thesis statements contain?

**Write:** A one page rough draft of Formal Paper 1 is due tonight

Monday, September 20

#### Literature Class 4: Oscar Cásares Author Visit

**Background:** Oscar Cásares will be visiting us today. As you reflect on our study of the novel, consider any questions you still have about the novel or about his life/work as a writer. Many writers, including Cásares use their voices to write more directly about their experiences through editorials and essays. We'll look at two examples of this: Cásares's editorial "A Child Doesn't Cry in English or Spanish" written during the immigration crisis and family detention in the summer of 2017 and Mexican novelist Reyna Grande who writes about her immigration to the United States in her essay "A Migrant's Story." Like Daniel, she was a young girl when she crossed to the United States. As you consider these two essays, look at how each differs in tone and style from the novel, even though they argue many of the same things about the political issues.

**Read:**

- Review Oscar Cásares website (<https://www.oscarcasares.com>)
- Oscar Cásares op-ed "[A Child Doesn't Cry in Spanish or English](#)." Please note that the article contains some photographs that may be upsetting, so care for yourself as you read.
- "[A Migrant's Story](#)" from Grande's website. She has also posted a video of herself reading this essay.

**Response paper:** Choose either of the two essays to write about for this response. In this essay, what is the writer's main argument, and what is one example of supporting evidence for this argument? How effective is this argument, in your opinion, especially in speaking to the personal and emotional responses to the topic?

Thursday, September 23

#### Literature Class 5: Shakespeare I

**Background:** We are moving to a brief unit on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. As one of the most popular and performed of all his plays, *Romeo and Juliet* deals, much like our novel, with questions of family, youth and age, and conflict. In Free Minds, our Shakespeare unit has often been a unit where we build community through our reading, analysis, viewing, and performing the play with the help of our UT partners, including the Shakespeare at Winedale program and its community outreach coordinator Clayton Stromberger. Clayton will be joining us as we review a few scenes and practice our critical reading and response techniques.

**Read:**

- Summary of *Romeo and Juliet* from the Folger Shakespeare Library website (course reader/online)  
<https://www.folger.edu/romeo-and-juliet>
- read the following scenes from the play: Act 1, Scene 5; Act 2, Scene 2; Act 3, Scene 5 (course reader/online)  
<https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/romeo-and-juliet/>

**Discussion question:** Romeo and Juliet are truly a romantic couple, but they also face real issues and conflicts in their lives because of this love. How difficult is it to be a romantic in the real world, as demonstrated by the play? Why do we love romances in spite of this? Choose a favorite romantic line from the play to support your answer.

Monday, September 27

### Literature Class 6: Shakespeare II

**Background:** Today, through viewing and performing scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*, we'll look at how Shakespeare creates a text for actors to perform, but how it is through the performance itself in which the play comes to life. Each performance is different, and it depends upon the interaction of the actors and the audience to create meaning.

#### Watch:

- View a film production of *Romeo and Juliet* I'll post some possibilities to stream films online through various platforms. Pay special attention to the scenes we've read and discussed in class.

**Response paper:** What has been your experience with Shakespeare in the past, both in and out of schools? How has our study of Shakespeare added to your understanding of his work and its relevance to our work in Free Minds? Write about a specific learning activity that we did in class that helped you understand the play in new ways. You may also include some questions you still have about the play.

Thursday, September 30

### Analytic Writing Class 3: Appealing to Readers

**Background:** I once had a friend say to me: "All communication is a form of manipulation." While I think this is somewhat extreme, she wasn't altogether wrong. When we communicate, whether on or off the page, we're often attempting to understand, convince, or get what we want. In order to accomplish our goal, we usually make an *appeal* to our audience (could be a spouse, teacher, co-worker, whoever). Typically, we appeal logically, emotionally, or ethically. Successful writers know what appeal(s) to use and when. While maybe not outright manipulation, there's definitely some strategy involved.

#### Read:

- *They Say, I Say, "So What? Who Cares?": Saying Why It Matters*, pgs 91-100
- *EasyWriter, Arguing Ethically and Persuasively*, pgs. 53-66

**Discuss:** We'll talk about the foundations of writing and rhetoric, including ethical, logical, and

emotional appeals. In other words, we'll talk about how writers establish credibility with their readers, convey knowledge, and appeal to the reader's emotions to make their point.

We'll also engage in an important part of the writing process: revision! We'll look back at a Monday response paper you've already turned in and revise it to practice writing for the "so what" and "who cares" (ex. 2 on pg 100).

Tuesday, October 5

### Controversy and Conversation

We have moved our class to Tuesday evening this week so that all of us can participate in the Humanities Institute's screening and discussion panel of the film, *A Reckoning in Boston*.

**Background:** Created by filmmaker James Rutenbeck and co-produced by Kafi Dixon and Carl Chandler, this documentary film explores issues of gentrification, inequality, and access to opportunity in Boston.

Here is a synopsis from [the film's website](#):

Kafi Dixon and Carl Chandler enrolled in a rigorous night course in the humanities at a community center in their Boston neighborhood of Dorchester.

Kafi, 44, sharp, witty and restless, dropped out of school at 15. She had her first baby a year later and two more soon after. Carl, 65, who lives on a small pension and disability payment in one of Boston's most dangerous neighborhoods, began the class with a keen interest in learning but little faith in educational institutions.

White suburban filmmaker James Rutenbeck came to Dorchester to document the students' engagement with the Clemente Course in the Humanities. The Clemente Course is taught in 34 sites across the U.S.--to those who have experienced homelessness, transitioned out of incarceration or faced barriers to a college education. The Clemente mission is to foster critical thinking through deep engagement with history, literature, philosophy and art history. Clemente students, its proponents assert, become fuller and freer citizens.

But over time James is forced to come to terms with a flawed film premise and his own complicity in racist structures. As he spends time with Carl and Kafi, he's awakened to the violence, racism and gentrification that threaten their very place in the city.

Troubled by his failure to bring the film together, he spends more time listening than filming and enlists Kafi and Carl as collaborators/ producers with a share in the film revenues. Five years on, despite many obstacles, Kafi and Carl arrive at surprising new places in their lives, and following their lead, James does too.

**Before class, you will be given instructions on how to sign up for and attend an online film screening and panel discussion. Stay tuned for details.**

You can watch a trailer of the film [here](#).

Thursday, October 7

### A Reckoning at Home

We will dedicate tonight's class to an exploration of the film, *A Reckoning in Boston*. Bringing this conversation home to our class, we will write and discuss how this film connects to our own experiences living in Austin and to our semester theme, **Voices at the Threshold**.

Monday, October 11

### Art History Unit with Dr. Janis Bergman-Carton

#### Unit Overview: Art, Borders, and Migration: An Introduction to Art & Visual Analysis

Can a work of art bring about change in the world? Might a work of art help us understand personal experiences of immigration and displacement? Immigrants have played a pivotal role in U.S. history and the country's understanding of itself. Today, more than 40 million immigrants live in the United States. In fact, more immigrants reside in the United States than in any other country, resulting in an abundant diversity of cultures and ethnicities. Some of these people came to the United States voluntarily, seeking a better life. Others were forced to migrate, including hundreds of thousands of Africans who were enslaved and transported to the country.

The works of art in this unit represent a wide range of views on immigration and migration. Some artists contemplate the experiences of their ancestors in their artwork. Other artists witness events or journeys connected to immigration and displacement. Many artists were immigrants themselves and chose to reflect upon and share their personal stories through the process of making their art. What can we learn from these works of art?

#### Art History Class 1: Analyzing Art about Migration and Immigration

**Background:** Visual analysis is the core skill of art history. The purpose of a visual analysis is to recognize and understand the visual choices the artist made in creating the artwork. By observing and writing about separate parts of the art object, you come to a better understanding of the art object as a whole. A visual analysis addresses an artwork's formal elements—visual attributes such as color, line, composition, texture, and size. A visual analysis may also include historical context or interpretations of meaning.

In class tonight we get to practice visual analysis skills described in your readings on five works created by artists who either witnessed journeys connected to immigration or were immigrants themselves looking back at their personal experience and translating it into a visual form.

The art works for class (available for close looking in "Art History Images," google file in class folder) include:

- **Image 1:** Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother*, 1936, gelatin silver photographic print
- **Image 2:** Dorothea Lange, *Migrant agricultural worker's family*, Nipomo, California, 1936, gelatin silver photographic print
- **Image 3:** Yasuo Kuniyoshi, *Cows in Pasture*, 1923, oil on canvas

- **Image 4:** Arshile Gorky, *The Artist and His Mother*, 1942, oil on canvas
- **Image 5:** Mark Rothko, *White Band №27*, 1954, oil on canvas

**Read or View the following:**

- From Khan Academy/ College Art History:
  1. [Introduction to Art Historical Analysis by Dr. Robert Glass](#)
  2. [Elements of Art, Color](#)
  3. [Elements of Art, Light and Shadow](#)
  4. [Principles of Composition: Balance, Symmetry, and Emphasis](#)

**Response Paper:** Art curator Green writes, “Whether or not migration has defined your human experience, you carry around evidence of the migration of your ancestors in your DNA.” In one page, describe how Green’s observation relates to your personal history and identity. **At what point did your ancestors emigrate to the U.S. and why? How did their decisions to migrate or emigrate shape aspects of your life?**

Thursday, October 14

## Art History Class 2: Jacob Lawrence & the Black Migration into American Art

**Background:** For well over a century, the U.S. has experienced waves of immigration from eastern and western Europe and later from Asia and Latin America. The U.S. also has been the site of internal mass migrations. The Black Migration is the largest and, arguably, the most significant. The Black Migration refers to the decision of approximately six million African Americans to relocate out of the rural South to the urban Northeast, Midwest and West between 1916 and 1970. The primary impetus was to escape the tyranny of Jim Crow laws and poor economic conditions.

The family of artist Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) was part of the Black Migration. When Lawrence was ten years old, his family migrated from South Carolina to Virginia, and finally, to New York to find jobs, better housing, and freedom from oppression. In 1941, when Lawrence was only twenty-three years old, he created *The Migration Series*, one of the most significant art projects of the twentieth century. In the landmark painting series Lawrence tells the story of the Black Migration, visually. The artist described this project as “a portrait of myself and my people.”

Growing up in New York in the 1920s and 1930s, Lawrence came into the orbit of the Harlem Renaissance. He was first exposed to art in an after school program at the Utopia House and later the Harlem Art Workshop. Lawrence also attended lectures on Black culture and exhibitions of African art at the 135th Street Public Library, the intellectual hub of the community.

Lawrence’s early work consisted of historical scenes about figures in Black history he admired, such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman. He started *The Migration Series* in 1940, and it remained his most ambitious project. Searing in their immediacy, the sixty paintings in the series show only essential imagery. Flattened, angular forms, strong diagonals, and contrasts of light and shadow contribute to the dynamism of the images. Although Lawrence used a limited palette, he arranged the colors to form focal points to direct the viewer’s attention. Some pictures are self-contained; others are more expansive. As the narrative unfolds, from image to image, the vantage point, compositions, and details change—in a manner reminiscent of a film. In some panels, figures dominate; in others, the setting propels the story.

Lawrence's series was immediately well-received, despite the fact that prior to 1941 there was very little representation of the subject of migration in art outside of documentary photography. The visually dynamic treatment Lawrence brought to the series ignited conversations about the universality of migration. Prior to Lawrence, almost no work by Black artists had been included in U.S. museum or gallery collections or in art history textbooks. Lawrence became the first African American artist to be represented by a "mainstream" art gallery, and he used his position to open doors for other artists of color to cross borders that structured the art world in the mid-twentieth century.

**Read and look closely at the images:** *The Great Migration: An American Story* by Jacob Lawrence (1995). Lawrence published this edition of his painting series in book form in 1995. Because Lawrence's paintings and texts were made to be seen in a certain sequence, like visual reading, the edition makes it possible spend time looking and reading the entire series in one place. It also allows us to look back and ahead in the book for the repeating visual or textual themes, rhythms, and motifs.

**Watch:** *Jacob Lawrence, The Migration Series* (Khan Academy - online)

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/late-europe-and-americas/modernity-ap/v/lawrence-migration-series>

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. In what ways does Lawrence use color, composition, and light and shadow to reinforce how the story of migration is a story about movement and change?
2. Why do you think Lawrence decided to couple narrative with image?
3. How are the two (narrative and image) connected? Do they tell different kinds of stories? Or do they tell the same stories differently?

Monday, October 18

### **Art History Class 3: Can Art Transcend National and Cultural Borders?**

**Background:** Art can be a language shared between individuals, nations, and cultures. It can re-declare identities that have been lost or abandoned when people find new homes. It can give migrant voices a means of being heard in an otherwise unsympathetic world.

Contemporary artists Bisa Butler and Aliza Nisenbaum attempt to shine light on what they see as the universality of migration as an experience shared by many. Butler creates dynamic quilt portraits that literally stitch together fabric scraps from her Black diaspora family: her father's homeland in Ghana, her mother's in Morocco, and quilting pieces she grew up around at her grandmother's house in New Orleans. Nisenbaum, born in Mexico City and now living in New York, describes herself as torn between wanting to be a social worker and also a painter. She began working with the Immigrant Movement International, a community-based project in NYC founded to create a space where immigrants can engage with contemporary art in an empowering way. Nisenbaum taught English to Mexican and Central American immigrants as part of the project, and also began painting their portraits.

**View:** [Bisa Butler: Portraits | Exhibition Stories](#), 2020 (The Art Institute of Chicago)

**Practice close looking:** Reproductions of three portrait quilts by Butler and the archival photographs that inspired them can be found in "Art History Images" (Google File inside class folder). Compare and contrast the portrait quilts with the historical photographs upon which they are based.

Image 6: *Bisa Butler, I Am Not Your Negro*, [Cotton, wool and chiffon]. 79 x 60 in., 2019

Image 7: *Bisa Butler, The Storm, the Whirlwind, and the Earthquake*, [Cotton, silk, wool, and velvet, quilted and appliqué], 50 x 88 x 2 in., 2020

Image 8: *Bisa Butler, The Warmth of Other Sons*, [Velvet, wool, cotton, silk, 108 x 104 in.] 2020

**Response Paper:** Select one of the pairings of a Butler quilt with the original archival photograph that inspired it to write about. Think about how the original photograph relates to the form Butler gives it in her quilt. Consider which qualities and elements remain consistent in both and which do not? What is different and how is it different? What effect does Butler seem to want to convey by making these changes? **In a one-page response paper, compare and contrast the portrait quilt and photograph.** The paper must contain at least one similarity and one difference between the two images.

Thursday, October 21

#### Art History Class 4: What is Border Art?

**Background:** Border Art is a contemporary art practice rooted in socio-political experiences, such as those on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, or frontera. Since its conception in the mid-1980's, this artistic practice has explored questions surrounding homeland, borders, identity, race, ethnicity, and national origins.

Although it originated on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, Border Art has opened up the possibility for artists around the world to explore similar concerns of identity and national origin(s) in their respective contexts. A border can be a physical division, dividing groups of people and families. But a border in contemporary art can also refer to a borderland area ripe for the creation of a cohesive community separate from mainstream cultures and identities.

The work of Luis Alfonso Jiménez Jr. and Ana Teresa Fernández is often described as Border Art. Jiménez was an American sculptor of Mexican descent who lived and worked in New Mexico. Jiménez spoke about his art as an expression of what it feels like to live between multiple cultures and identities. He became best known for massive fiberglass public sculptures depicting Hispanic and Native American dancers, cowboys, and barrio workers. These sculptures reinterpret imagery associated with the American West and Mexican American culture. During our visit to the Blanton Museum in November, we will be fortunate enough to see a special exhibition devoted to the artist, *Border Vision: Luis Jiménez's Southwest*.

Ana Teresa Fernández (b. 1980) is a Mexican performance artist and painter. Fernández's *Borrando la Frontera*, or *Erasing the Border*, is a project that took place in 2019 in Baja, California, Sonora, and Ciudad Juárez. Members of a cultural organization called Border/Arte "removed" parts of the U.S.-Mexico border fence in three places by painting large sections of it sky blue, allowing the fence to visually blend into the background. Fernández describes the project as an effort to symbolically erase a long-standing physical barrier that separates families and causes widespread misery.

#### View these two videos:

- [Colores: Luis Jiménez \(PBS 2015\)](https://www.pbs.org/video/colores-luis-jimenez)  
<https://www.pbs.org/video/colores-luis-jimenez>
- [Erasing The U.S. -Mexico Border With Art | LatiNation](#), 2017

### Discussion Questions:

1. Jiménez says the technical part of making his work and the materials he uses are part of his philosophy of art. What do you think he means by that?
2. What does Jiménez mean when he talks about not wanting to create “high art?”
3. Would you describe *Borrando la Frontera*, or *Erasing the Border* as art or as political activism?

Monday, October 25

### Analytic Writing Class 4: How to Disagree

**Background:** One of the most exciting things students discover in writing classes is that they’re allowed to disagree with the author--and with me! Academic writing asks you to think critically, and sometimes this results in you finding yourself in opposition to the author’s points. I think this is a really exciting place to land. This chapter will offer helpful strategies when we find ourselves partially or fully disagreeing with what we’ve read. Just like in our daily lives, when we disagree, we want to do so empathetically and respectfully.

#### Read:

- *They Say, I Say*, “Yes / No / Okay, But”: Three Ways to Respond, pgs. 53-66
- *EasyWriter*, Reviewing, Revising, and Editing, pgs. 23-26

**Discuss:** This chapter will provide you with a potential template for writing your second essay, but also for the rest of your academic career: you can agree with a text, disagree with it, or a mixture of both. We’ll also explore the nuts and bolts of revising and editing.

**Due:** One page rough draft of Formal Paper 2

Thursday, October 28

### Analytic Writing Class 5: The Art of Quoting and Summarizing

**Background:** I don’t think I fully understood why we quote and summarize in academic writing until late in my undergraduate career. I didn’t know why they were so essential to writing and why there were “good” and “bad” ways to do each. I wondered why I just couldn’t sit down to write my paper without including what others had to say. As a new writer, I would force a quote into a paragraph instead of building the paragraph in response to that quote. I didn’t fully grasp the “conversation” part of the academic conversation and, as a result, wrote a lot of papers that were more like monologues (or rants!). Quoting and summarizing well bring your paper to life and enhance credibility with readers, as it demonstrates you’ve thoughtfully considered a topic from all angles.

#### Read:

- *They Say, I Say*, “Her Point Is”: The Art of Summarizing, pgs 30-42
- “As He Himself Puts It”: The Art of Quoting, pgs 43-52
- *EasyWriter*, Top Twenty Tips for Editing Your Writing, pgs. 27-38



**Discuss:** When we write, we are participating in a conversation, and in order to be a part of that conversation, we have to know what other people are saying and discuss their ideas competently. In order to do that on the page, we've got to know how to summarize and quote. We'll look at some sample papers and work through some exercises to sharpen our ability to quote and summarize in preparation for your second essay. Finally, we'll look through the Top Twenty Tips for Editing Your Writing as you prepare to turn in your second essay.

Monday, November 1

### Unit Overview: *What is Philosophy?*

Welcome to the philosophy unit! I'm Matthew, your philosophy prof. Before we dive in, let me make a few preliminary comments to help get us started. Where our journey will take us remains to be discovered.

In your first reading (a short essay by me), I make the point that there's a peculiar problem about "introducing philosophy," namely, the question "What is philosophy?" turns out to be a philosophical problem of its own. Maybe all you need to know for the moment is that philosophy is like you and me: A living thing. I don't want to be pinned down by somebody's definition of me, and I doubt you do either. So definitions don't work too well for something that exists primarily as *activity*.

I can tell you that philosophy is about asking questions that "open" things, that encourage things to reveal their depths — depths that we didn't realize were even *there*. Poems do that sort of "opening" as well, and so, for reasons we're going to discuss in more detail as we progress, we're going to explore philosophy by reading poems.

Now, don't get the wrong idea. I am *not* a poet or poetry expert. I'm a philosopher.

But I can read, and sometimes I even think hard about what I read. When I think about some of the poems I've read, I see a movement, an activity in the words that's really . . . well, *philosophical*. It's not so much that I'm thinking *about* the poem; the poem takes over and starts thinking through me. And I'm not the only one who experiences that philosophical movement of poetry, so I'm not just making this up.

So, for our brief exploration of philosophy, I chose poems of all kinds, from lots of places and times, in all sorts of styles and forms. Some are by people we call philosophers; most aren't. But that doesn't matter, because philosophy is like the wind that blows where it will.

We're going to spend some time together reading these poems. We'll try to ask their questions as well as some questions of our own — like, *What is philosophy?* And we'll open ourselves to the answers the movement of each poem offers. By the end of this little journey, if we're lucky, we'll know what we're talking about.

### Philosophy Class 1: What is Philosophy?

In this  
There is an intimation of Truth.

I want to express it,  
But have forgotten all words.  
—Tau Chyen

In our first class, we're going to stake out the territory of philosophy in preparation for our exploration. We'll start with a little discussion of why it's hard to get started with philosophy, and then we'll take up poetry as an "occasion" for philosophical ways of seeing and thinking.

One really big problem about philosophy is that it always seems to lie just a little beyond what words can say about things. So we either have to stop talking altogether, or we have to find ways to use words to carry us past what words are meant to do. Poems are constantly testing the limits of words, and that's why poems can move us in a philosophical way — often unexpectedly.

I've included the lyrics to a They Might Be Giants song to illustrate that philosophy seems to sprout out of nowhere when you don't expect it. (Stay tuned for the Gilgamesh Experiment, too. You can't get entertainment like that on YouTube.)

**Read:**

- Daude Laurents. "What is philosophy?" (course reader & google folder)
- Ortega y Gasset, excerpt from What is Philosophy? (course reader & google folder)
- selected poems (course reader & google folder)

**Response Paper Prompt:**

Suppose you're shopping for shoes with a friend, and the friend asks you, "What is philosophy?" What would you tell your friend? How do you use the word "philosophy"? Do you ever ask yourself questions that you consider philosophical? Give some examples and explain why those questions feel philosophical to you.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why is it hard to find a starting point for introducing philosophy?
- What are some take-away points from the readings about what philosophy is?
- What did you make of the lyrics to the TMBG song, "Push Back the Hands"? What was your initial reaction? Why is it "philosophical"?

Thursday, November 4

**Philosophy Class 2: Reality**

From the nothing the begetting,  
From the nothing the increase,  
From the nothing the abundance,  
The power of increasing  
The living breath.  
—Maori chant, *The Creation*

In this class, we're going to read some poems, chants, and hymns and look beneath the surface to see how these poetic expressions raise philosophical questions about *reality*. Questions about reality (like, What is real? What is appearance or illusion? What is the ultimate nature of things?) fall under a branch of philosophy known as *metaphysics*. Of course the point of metaphysics is not just to pose questions, but to try to answer them. These poems will give us an opportunity to start thinking about various answers to questions about the nature of reality.

**Read:**

- Daude Laurents: Reality is a Real Problem (course reader & google folder)
- Selected poems (course reader & google folder)

**Discussion Questions**

- Do you think these excerpts are poems? Why or why not?
- What are some common themes you see in these poems (if they are poems!)?
- How do these poems address the theme of reality? What sort of questions do you hear in the words? How do these words become a search for truth?
- What sort of answers to these questions do these words offer us?
- How do you read yourself and your world into these words? Pick two excerpts as examples and explain.

Monday, November 8

**No class tonight due to weekend Blanton Museum of Art Visit.**

Thursday, November 11

**Art History Class 5: Cross-cultural Representations of the Human Body and Notions of Beauty**

Ever since people first made what we call art, they have been fascinated with their own image and have used the human body to express ideas and ideals. Not all cultures value the same qualities in works of art and representations of the human body. Not all cultures have the same ideas about beauty in art. Tonight we will practice the visual language covered in your reading and viewing, the visual language of naturalism, realism, idealism, and abstraction that art historians use to analyze modes of representation of the body in different cultural traditions.

**Watch:**

- **this 8-minute video about representations of the body in western sculpture:**  
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-history-basics/tools-understanding-art/v/the-body-in-western-sculpture>
- **Must Art Be Beautiful?**  
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/start-here-apah/why-art-matters-apah/v/must-art-be-beautiful>

**Read:**

- “Naturalism, Realism, Abstraction, and Idealization” (Khan Academy website)  
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/start-here-apah/language-of-art-history-apah/a/naturalism-realism-abstraction-and-idealization>

#### Discussion questions:

1. Are you more strongly drawn to the figures represented in a naturalistic manner or those that are more stylized, and abstracted? Why?
2. What is the difference between naturalism and realism?
3. Do you think art “must be beautiful”? If so, what does that mean to you?

Saturday, November 13

#### Art History Class 6: Visit to the Blanton Art Museum

There is no reading or assignment for this evening. Our tour will take place from 2-4 pm, and we will provide details about where to meet and what to bring before our visit.

For general information, or to get excited about our tour, visit <https://blantonmuseum.org/>.

Don’t forget to bring your energy and close looking skills to the Blanton Art Museum!

Monday, November 15

#### Philosophy Class 3: Reality, Part 2

There remains just one account of a way: that **it is**.  
On this way there are very many signs,  
That being uncreated and imperishable **it is**,  
Whole and of a single kind, unshaken and perfect.  
—Parmenides, *Way of Truth*

Parmenides (fl. 475 BCE) was one of the first philosophers in the Western tradition, and he wrote his two major philosophical works as poems. We’re going to read some excerpts from these poems to see not just what philosophical *question* he was asking, but how he tried to give an answer that is also philosophical.

To get ready for *that* discussion, we’re going to talk about Thales, who celebrated the very first birthday of philosophy on May 28, 585 BCE. Thales was the first person in the Western tradition to differentiate *philosophical* answers from other kinds of answers — and in the process, philosophy got a divorce from religion.

#### Readings

- Daude Laurents, “Thales” (course reader & google folder)
- Parmenides, excerpts (course reader & google folder)

#### Response Paper:

Think about Thales: He predicted an eclipse, and when people came to congratulate him on being favored by the gods with this insight, he stopped them. *It wasn't an inspiration by the gods*, I imagine him saying; *I worked it out on my own — and you can, too. Let me show you.*

How was Thales's attitude and approach to knowing about the eclipse *different* from what people expected? Why do you think they assumed this knowledge came from the gods? What is different about how *religion* knows things and how *philosophy* knows things? Is there room in the world for both kinds of knowing? Explain your answer (and give some examples).

#### Discussion Questions:

- Thinking about Thales and his prediction of the eclipse (and people's reaction!), what is different about *philosophical* answers to questions from other sorts of answers?
  - How do you think the answers of religion differ from philosophical answers?
- Do you think these Parmenides excerpts are poems? Why or why not?
- What questions is Parmenides asking?
- What sort of answers does he give?
- How do you read yourself and your world into his words?
- How is Parmenides's *way* of giving an answer to the question posed different from the excerpts we read last class?

Thursday, November 18

#### Philosophy Class 4: Knowledge

Catch only what you've thrown yourself,  
All is mere skill and little gain;  
But when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball  
Thrown by an eternal partner  
With accurate and measured swing  
Towards you, to your centre, in an arch  
From the great bridgebuilding of God:  
Why catching then becomes a power—  
Not yours, a world's.  
—Rainer Maria Rilke

What does it mean *to know* something? How is knowing different from other states of mind, like sensing, or believing? What are the limits of what we can know? *Are* there any limits? In this class, we'll explore the branch of philosophy concerned with knowing and knowledge — officially called *epistemology*. Our goal, as with reality, is to clarify what some of the questions are and get inside various perspectives on our ability to know.

#### Read:

- Daude Laurents. "How do I know?"
- Selected poems

### Discussion Questions

- Do you think these excerpts are poems? Why or why not?
- What are some common themes you see in these poems (if they are poems!)?
- How do these poems address the theme of knowledge? What sort of questions do you hear in the words? How do these words become a search for truth?
- What sort of answers to these questions do these words offer us?
- How do you read yourself and your world into these words? Pick two excerpts as examples and explain.

Monday, November 22

### Philosophy Class 5: Value

But can what I say be real, O Life Giver?  
We merely sleep, we were merely born to dream,  
and though I say it here on earth  
it falls on no one's ears.

Though it be jade,  
though it be jewels,  
Directed to Life Giver,  
Even so it falls on no one's ears.  
— "Another," *Cantares Mexicanos*

People sometimes say that the third major branch of philosophy is *ethics*, which is the philosophical problem of determining judgments of morality and how to act on these determinations. Speaking as a philosopher, I say that's actually a bit too narrow. I would argue that the third major branch of philosophy is about *value* and how we make judgments about value. In other words, what do we value? How do we decide what to value? And when we do decide what we value, what can or should we do about it?

Don't be fooled by the word *judgment*. Yes, in ordinary language, it can have the connotation of dissing you or looking down on you — like, Don't judge me! But in philosophy, it means deliberating about a quandary and coming to a conclusion, a *judgment*.

If you think about it, the study of value judgments includes the study of ethics, but it also includes examination of claims about art and music — and even about what makes for a good life. In this final class, we're going to explore some questions about value and judgments about value, applied to various areas of life, from morality to art to living a good life.

### Read:

- Daude Laurents. *Introducing the Mexica* (course reader & google folder)
- Selected poems (course reader & google)

### Response Paper:

Read the poem “Another” from the *Cantares Mexicanos* (in the course reader for this class). What philosophical questions do you think the author is trying to address? What does the author say about human life? Is the picture of life found in these words pessimistic or optimistic? Why? Use several examples of words/images from the poem to support your position.

### Discussion Questions

- Do you think these excerpts are poems? Why or why not?
- What are some common themes you see in these poems (if they are poems!)?
- How do these poems address the theme of value? What sort of questions do you hear in the words? How do these words become a search for truth?
- What sort of answers to these questions do these words offer us?
- How do you read yourself and your world into these words? Pick two excerpts as examples and explain.

Thursday, November 25

**We will not meet for class on this night in observance of the Thanksgiving holiday.**

Monday, November 29

### Creative Writing Unit with Vivé Griffith, MA, MFA

The purpose of poetry is to remind us  
how difficult it is to remain just one person,  
for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors,  
and invisible guests come in and out at will.

—Czeslaw Milosz

### Unit Overview

For the Creative Writing unit this fall, we will focus on one genre (type) of writing: Poetry.

The first poems we know of are the great epics, poems like *The Odyssey* that tell the stories of a culture and a people. They were created to be sung, and the rhythm and rhyme we now 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 offered a strong sense of a culture. For example, we know that hospitality was important to the Ancient Greeks in part because in *The Odyssey* the character of Odysseus comes home disguised as a stranger. He is welcomed in and his feet are cleansed with oil, because guests are treated with respect in that world.

In this unit we will explore how the American experience is given voice in poetry—from the “father” of American poetry, Walt Whitman, to 22-year-old Amanda Gorman, who read a poem at President Joe Biden’s inauguration in January. You will read five to ten poems for each class period, taking time to read them several times and to hear them aloud.

We will consider the craft of poetry, the specific decisions poets make in language, style, structure, and image that bring a poem to life. And we will work on bringing those elements of craft into our own writing by composing and revising poems. I strongly believe that whether or not we want to become poets, practicing the craft of poetry will make us better writers.

I also believe that poetry provides a kind of antidote for the fast-moving, increasingly distracted culture that we all live in. Poetry asks us to slow down. It asks us to pay attention. It asks us to notice. My hope is that our shared travels through poetry will provide all of us with a bit of space to see our lives and our world anew and to honor the small and specific stories that shape our lives.

## **Texts**

You will find all reading for the unit in one of two places:

1. *The Penguin Anthology of Twentieth Century American Poetry*, edited by Rita Dove and published in 2011. Dove was the first African American to be appointed Poet Laureate by the Library of Congress. This is a big, rich collection of poems, and while we will only read a fraction of the work in it, I hope you’ll enjoy exploring it and having it as a resource on your bookshelf.

2. In our Course Reader, I have collected poems from outside of the 20th century – Whitman’s 19th century “Song of Myself” from *Leaves of Grass* and contemporary 21st century poets.

## **Assignments**

Creative Writing comprises 20% of your total grade for Free Minds. During our unit, you will only be working on Creative Writing. All assignments will be turned in to me, Vivé, and not to A.R.

You will have a reading assignment and a writing assignment due each class session. It is important that you pay attention to the syllabus and get all writing in on time. You will be receiving feedback on your writing and working toward a final assignment, a Poetry Collection of two poem revisions and a short reflection, due on the final night of class, 12/16. We will finish the unit with a class reading, hearing one poem from each student in the room. This is a celebratory and powerful event, and all faculty are invited to join us.

Half of your grade for Creative Writing is comprised of turning in nightly writing assignments over the five class periods. The other half is based on the quality of your Poetry Collection, including points for participating in our final reading.

The late assignment policy in this unit mirrors that for your Response Papers – I will only accept late work one class period after it is due, and then for 50% credit. Because we are building on previous work



during each class, it's important that you keep on top of the assignments. If you are not in class, you are still expected to turn in your work electronically to me or Amelia.

### **Creative Writing Class 1: Walt Whitman and the Search for a Poetry of Democracy**

We will begin the creative writing unit with one of the historic figures most associated with American poetry, Walt Whitman. Born on Long Island, NY, in 1819, Whitman believed that American poetry needed to be democratic and reach out to the common man alongside the learned and literary. He abandoned rhyme and wrote a verse that was broad and embracing, with cadences out of the Bible. I strongly encourage to read the excerpts from "Song of Myself" aloud to hear the musicality of it.

Whitman self-published what became known as *Leaves of Grass*, of which "Song of Myself" is a part, in 1855. He then continued to return to it and revise it for the rest of his life. We will be reading from the final 1892 edition.

As you read Whitman for tonight's class, consider how poetry can be used to capture and represent a culture, and the ways in which Whitman did or didn't capture some essence of America in the 19th century. Many of the poets we'll read in this unit will be responding to Whitman.

#### **Read:**

Course Reader

- Walt Whitman, introduction and "Song of Myself" excerpts. You can read more of the poem if you'd like at the [Poetry Foundation](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/) website.

#### **Write:**

For your first poem, you will write your own "Song of Myself." Your job won't be to capture the full national spirit, but to infuse a poem with the spirit of your own life. You'll receive your prompt in a separate assignment sheet to guide you through.

Thursday, December 2

### **Creative Writing Class 2: Image and Detail: Helping the Reader See**

Two related ideas – image and detail-- 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. Look for the images in these poems, how they use the five senses, how they make an idea come to life with specific details.

#### **Read:**

*Penguin Anthology*

- Robert Hayden, “Those Winter Sundays” (156)
- Langston Hughes, “Harlem” (129)
- Naomi Shihab Nye, “The Traveling Onion” (498)
- Gary Soto, “Oranges” (506)
- Natasha Trethewey, “Flounder” (558)
- Miller Williams, “Let Me Tell You” (312)
- William Carlos Williams, “The Red Wheelbarrow” (41)

### **Write:**

You will write a first draft of a poem today. Choose between these two prompts:

1. Naomi Shihab Nye’s poem “The Traveling Onion” offers praise to a mundane item, in this case, a regular onion. There is a long history of poets writing odes, or songs of praise, to all kinds of things. Choose something from your life that you think deserves honoring. Make it something simple and regular, rather than something grand and spectacular. Write an ode to a favorite food, or to a regular activity that you don’t usually think about. You might write an ode to the #20 bus, or a praise song to umbrellas, a celebration of cornbread or of the hairbrush you’ve had for so many years.

Look around your world. What needs celebrating?

2. Write a poem in which you teach the reader to do something. Maybe it’s something you do every day, a ritual or practice. Make it something concrete, something in which you are an expert. (It doesn’t have to be fancy.) Changing a diaper? Training for a marathon? Tuning a guitar? Making Christmas tamales? Locking that tricky door that always blows open?

Consider the sensory details of the action. What does it taste like, smell like, feel like, look like, sound like? What about images? What would bring it to life for your reader?

Your poem should be at least 10 lines. It should not rhyme. It should include as many specific details and images as possible.

Monday, December 6

### **Creative Writing Class 3: Structuring a Poem**

Today we will look at ways poets structure poems, considering line length, stanza length, short poems and long ones. The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge offered us this pithy quote: “I wish our clever young poets would remember my homely definitions of prose and poetry; prose—words in their best order; poetry—the best words in their best order.” Let’s look at how the best order and the best shape make poems come alive.

Poems are broken down into lines and stanzas. A stanza is like a paragraph in a poem. It comes from the Italian word “stanza,” meaning “room,” and you can think of stanzas as the rooms a reader walks through in a poem. Pay attention to whether the lines in the poem are short or long. Is the poem broken

into several stanzas or just one? What is the impact of these choices on your experience of reading the poem? On the topic or meaning of the poem itself?

**Read:**

*Penguin Anthology*

- Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art" (153)
- Gwendolyn Brooks, "We Real Cool" (185)
- Joy Harjo, "She Had Some Horses" and "My House is the Red Earth" (472-4)
- Terrance Hayes, "At Pegasus" (568)
- Marie Howe, "What the Living Do" (470)
- Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (127)
- James Wright, "Lying in a Hammock on William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota" (278)

**Write:**

For today you will write a poem about a place, using one of the three prompts below. Your poem should be at least 12 lines, not rhyme, and have a title. Aim to make it filled with image and detail. Consider the type of form you think might best express what you want to say. Take us to the place with you.

Choose one of these prompts:

1. Write a descriptive poem about a room in your home or your life. Really sit in that place and notice what is around you. Think about the objects, memories, smells, and colors that make it a specific place. A potential starting line can be, "If you held this room in your hand..."
2. Take a walk and bring a notebook. Write a poem in which the walk comes alive by writing about what you see and experience on the way.
3. Take out a blank piece of paper and draw a map of the place where you grew up, the streets and buildings, landmarks and empty places. Let that map guide you to a poem about one of the places you drew. Include the map when you turn in the poem

Thursday, December 9

**Creative Writing Class 4: Voice: How Poems Sound**

Tonight we will be thinking about how a poem sounds. Remember, poetry originated in song, and it is still the literary genre that comes closest to song. Pay attention to the ways poets use rhythm and rhyme. ("My Papa's Waltz" is a great example.") Notice the specific word choices of the poets. Look for the following poetry techniques:

- Alliteration: using the same letter or consonant sound in adjacent or close words
- Assonance: repetition of a vowel sound in adjacent or close words
- Repetition: repeating words or phrases for meaning or music.

These and other techniques are what separate poetry from prose, regardless of the line breaks. Really listen the poems you read for today. Hear them aloud. Find their music.

**Read:**

*Penguin Anthology*

- Lucille Clifton, “Homage to My Hips” (335)
- Rita Dove, “Daystar” (488)
- Yusef Komunyakaa, “Facing It” (441)
- Frank O’Hara, “The Day Lady Died” (252)
- Sharon Olds, “The Language of the Brag” (405)
- Mary Oliver, “The Summer Day” (330)
- Sonia Sanchez, “poem at thirty” (325)

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. When we write about ourselves, we also give voice to our communities and worlds.

We will write today out of our personal experience, but think about how that experience can say something larger. And we’ll consider how to bring music and sound into our work.

**Write:**

Choose one of the following prompts:

1. Sharon Olds places herself beside Walt Whitman and Allan Ginsberg in “The Language of the Brag,” asserting that bearing children is an act of heroism. Write a poem in which you “brag” about something you have done.
2. Frank O’Hara writes about hearing of Billie Holiday’s death in “The Day Lady Died.” Write a poem about the day you learned that someone famous died. Consider starting it with the kind of specifics that O’Hara does: “It is 12:20 in New York a Friday.” What time was it when you learned? Where were you? Take it from there.

Your poem should be at least 12 lines, not rhyme, and have a title. Fill it with image and detail, be deliberate in your line breaks, and play with the sounds of the language you use.

Monday, December 13

**Creative Writing Class 5: Capturing the Moment in Poems**

Walt Whitman hoped to capture a national spirit in his poems, and many contemporary poets are often concerned with how to capture the concerns of the day in a poem. As Tracy K. Smith, former US Poet Laureate and editor of the anthology, *American Journal*, said in the New York Times, for much of the 20th century, American poets rarely wrote poems that could be considered “political.” American poetry

leaned toward the personal and lyrical, even while poets in other parts of the world were writing with an eye toward social justice and change. This started to shift after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, when many people turned to poetry to find comfort or to vent their feelings. Says Smith:

In the intervening years, political poetry, even here in America, has done much more than vent. It has become a means of owning up to the complexity of our problems, of accepting the likelihood that even we the righteous might be implicated by or complicit in some facet of the very wrongs we decry. Poems willing to enter into this fraught space don't merely stand on the bank calling out instructions on how or what to believe; they take us by the arm and walk us into the lake, wetting us with the muddied and the muddled, and sometimes even the holy. ("Politics and Poetry," New York Times, 12/10/18)

Today we will look at a poem written and published in 2020 that speaks to our global moment and one written almost 25 years ago that takes on a concern of its time. Then we will look at how poems can be written for grand occasions by reading the work of the past three poets invited to compose poems for presidential inaugurations. In many ways, their task is similar to that of Walt Whitman: to speak to the nation and in doing so, to shape and define it. How much do their words reflect your own sense of our country? What is missing?

#### **Read:**

Course Reader

Poems by Jericho Brown, Joan Larkin, Elizabeth Alexander, Richard Blanco, and Amanda Gorman

#### **Write:**

For your final poem of the unit, try to bring all that you've learned about image and detail, structure, and voice to the page. Then choose one of these prompts:

1. Think about an issue that is important to you, something you care about. It may be something that affects you directly, or something more distant but no less important, like border separation. For Joan Larkin in "Inventory," that was the AIDS crisis. Write a poem that uses the structure Larkin used, repeating stanzas that begin with the words, "One who." Illuminate your issue by giving us the "ones who" are impacted by it. Be specific.
2. Write a poem for an occasion. You could imagine you were invited to write an inaugural poem, but you could also choose a more personal occasion—a birthday, a graduation, a wedding. Just be sure that you don't fall into abstraction and instead keep things specific and concrete. How can your words mark the occasion?

Have all of the poems you've written in the unit close by for class tonight. We'll talk about how to approach revising them for your final Poetry Portfolio. Look for a handout with details. And congratulations on reading, writing, and discussing your way to the final class in the semester!

### **Final Class: Celebration and Sharing**

**Background:** Tonight you will reflect on and celebrate the accomplishments of the past few months. Each of you will select a piece of writing from your final portfolio to share by presenting it to the class and Free Minds community. All faculty members will join us to celebrate your accomplishments.

**\*\*\*Final Portfolio Due\*\*\***

Congratulations on all of your hard work this semester!