

HUM 17100: LANGUAGE AND THE HUMAN

IDENTITY

Winter Term 202X

Time: TBA

Instructor: TBA
Email: TBA
Office: TBA
Office Hours: TBA

Writing Intern: TBA
Email: TBA

We acknowledge with respect the Myaamia, Illinois, and Potawatomi people on whose traditional, ancestral, and unceded land we work and whose historical relationships with that land continue to this day.

Language is at the center of what it means to be human and is instrumental in all humanistic pursuits. With it, we understand others, persuade, argue, reason, and think. This course aims to provoke critical examination of common assumptions that determine our understanding of language, texts, and the ways language is used and understood via three interconnected processes: *power*, *identity*, and *thought*. Focusing on these processes and their representation in art, literature and film, we will consider How does language support structures of power and privilege? How does language shape our assumptions and beliefs? How does language motivate us to act or keeps us from acting? Is language a basic human right? How does language influence the ways we think about race, gender, sexual orientation, and species? How do we use language to project their own identity? How do we use it to perceive or shape the identity of others?

REQUIRED READINGS

- [Mules and Men](#) by Zora Neale Hurston (ISBN-13 : 978-0061350177)
- [Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez](#) by Richard Rodriguez (ISBN-13 : 978-0553272932)
- [The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao](#) by Junot Díaz (ISBN-13 : 978-1594483295)

Texts are available for purchase at the Seminary Co-op Bookstore. Please do your best to purchase the correct editions, using the provided ISBN, so that page numbers are in common. All other readings are available in digital format on Canvas.

REQUIRED FILM SCREENING (TBA):

- ...
- ...

Course Policies

Attendance and Participation

You are expected to attend every session, to be on time, and to be present and participate. Reading assignments must be completed in advance of class and contribute to the discussion board with at least one comment. Failure to attend sessions will impact your grade. If you have an emergency and have to miss a session, please email me before class to let me know.

Class Format

We will meet twice a week for a live discussion, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Weekly reading and viewing assignments should be completed by that class time. There will be occasional asynchronous instructional materials. The discussions will not be recorded, so please plan your schedule accordingly.

Grade distribution

1) Engagement and Canvas Discussion posts.....	35 %
2) Paper 1 (2-3 pages)	15 %
3) Paper 2 (4-5 pages)	20%
4) Paper 3 (5-6 pages)	30%
TOTAL.....	100%

Further Explanations of Course (and Grading) Components

Engagement--Overview:

- Plan to read and to read carefully. Plan to participate weekly in discussion boards on Canvas. Use the list of “Conversational Moves” (below) to help make this a good conversation. Over the quarter, use as many of the conversational moves as you can. I may ask you to reflect on your use of these and what you have learned from shaping the discussion in these ways. Plan to participate in the live discussions. Try to say something each time.
- Please be sure to stay in contact should anything interfere with your class participation. I will not know what is going on unless you tell me. So please make me aware of tech issues, illness, personal circumstances, etc. and we will try to find workarounds and ways to adapt to circumstances where that is needed.
- It may be that I may become ill during the quarter. In that event, I will do my best to find someone to cover any instruction I cannot complete myself.

Engagement—Canvas Discussion Posts:

- You are asked to contribute at least two entries to the Canvas Discussions every week. You are welcome to contribute more.
- Unless I specified otherwise (i.e. if I indicate that a particular task that week is required), you can engage in Canvas discussions in 3 ways: (1) By responding to a topic that I post; (2) by starting a topic of your own; or (3) by responding to a classmate’s topic or a classmate’s post in my topic. Let’s start by focusing on (1) and (3).
- Regarding (1) and (3):

- When you are responding to a classmate’s post (or one of mine), be sure to engage with the passage that your classmate has chosen. You may introduce a passage you feel is related, but first consider the passage. Your post should employ one of the “conversational moves” (below) to engage with your classmates. Try out as many of these as you can during the quarter, and see if you think they improve the quality of the conversation! You should feel free to engage with one another in threads that I start.
- For the conversation to go somewhere, it will need to be the case that you read the thread through to the point where you are posting. This may mean you are not answering my questions directly, but conversing about answers that have been proposed. Think of this as a very slow, but also more precise version of what we do in class—democratized for those who like to think before they talk.
- Regarding (2):
 - If you are starting a new discussion topic, please choose a passage (no more than a page; it can be as short as a sentence) from the week’s readings that you find particularly interesting, problematic, difficult, important, funny, strange, enigmatic, etc. Then state an observation about what you found striking in this passage. Was it an element of language—a salient or ambiguous word, a metaphor or motif, an image, or some combination of these and other features—that drew your attention to the passage? When we are working on more theoretical texts, it may be that a sentence illuminates a concept in a way you find particularly helpful—or jars your sense of how ideas are fitting together. (These suggestions are, of course, suggestive rather than exhaustive.) Pose at least one discussion question for your classmates. Do you want to explore an idea? Work towards clarification on a concept? Find other information from the text that might complicate or support a hypothesis or claim about the passage? Tell the group what sort of collaboration you would like. It is fine—even encouraged up to a point—to make use of the recorded lecture material in framing questions.
 - If you are starting a topic, you might need to write a paragraph or so (~100-300 words). Other posts can be shorter as long as they are substantive.
 - Please refer to texts by their most universal indexing features when possible. (Act and scene numbers mostly translate across editions, though not always—and for interesting reasons. Page numbers of course are not useful for anyone reading a different edition.) Ask a clear question of your classmates.
 - Posts you design, or the manner in which you respond to questions, can be textually specific reflections on larger course themes.
 - Read all of your classmates’ posts and responses. If you’d like to respond further, you can! Two posts are the minimum, not the limit. If you contribute two substantial posts, it is okay to also write briefer remarks on other threads. However, don’t just “agree” or “disagree.” Always say why.
 - It is good to be serious and scholarly in these posts, but also feel free to have fun. If you contribute two substantive posts and then want to say something briefer, that is completely fine.

Conversational Moves¹

- Ask a question or make a comment that shows you are interested in what another person has said.
- Ask a question or make a comment that encourages someone else to elaborate on something that person has said.
- Make a comment that underscores the link between two people's contributions. Make this link explicit in your comment.
- Make a comment indicating that you found another person's ideas interesting or useful. Be specific as to why this was the case.
- Contribute something that builds on or springs from what someone else has said. Be explicit about the way you are building on the other person's thoughts.
- Make a summary observation that takes into account several people's contributions and that touches on a reoccurring theme in the discussion.
- Ask a cause-and-effect question – for example, “Can you explain why you think it's true that if these things are in place, such and such a thing will occur?”
- Find a way to express appreciation for what you have gained from the discussion. Try to be specific about what it was that helped you understand something better.
- Disagree with someone in a respectful and constructive way.

Writing Seminars

Your class will be divided into **SIX** groups, and your writing intern will hold three writing seminars throughout the quarter for each group. Participating in these seminars fulfills the requirements of HUMA 19100, which is a graduation requirement. Let me repeat: **ATTENDING THESE SEMINARS IS REQUIRED TO GRADUATE.**

The purpose of the seminars is to teach you the craft of academic writing, which we will do by workshopping the writing you do for your assignments in this class. Either by offering each other recommendations for revision of in-progress drafts or by analyzing already-completed assignments in-depth, you will learn principles of academic argumentation, organization, and style. These skills will serve you throughout your career as university students, as well as after you graduate. Your writing intern will work out the scheduling with you to ensure that each group is able to attend all three seminars.

Etiquette and Technology Policy

Let me begin by emphasizing that the general approach for this course is to foster intellectual nourishment, social connection, and personal accommodation across time zones, technological variability, and personal contexts. I will seek feedback from you and will remain flexible in order to adjust to what works and what doesn't. I would invite you to prioritize supporting each other, seek simple solutions, share resources, and communicate clearly. I invite you to share your experiences and contact me with any concerns and questions anytime. Since this is all very much an experiment, we might make changes when needed.

¹ From Brookfield & Preskill, 2005. *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*. San Francisco Jossey-Bass.

Great discussion is characterized by deep respect and an environment in which all people have the freedom to agree and disagree, clarify and challenge, be heard and speak. The general expectations of conduct for the university, of course, apply to the remote learning as well; you may refer to these guidelines in the student handbook. Occasionally in this class we will discuss difficult topics related to race, gender, inequality, class, and oppression. Each of you comes into this class with a different perspective that can be shared to enhance our understanding of these issues. I ask that you enter these conversations with respect, curiosity, and cultural humility. You should be open to alternative perspectives and willing to revise beliefs that are based on misinformation. As a general rule, your ideas and experiences can always be shared during these conversations but please refrain from dismissing the experiences of others. Personal attacks of any kind will not be tolerated.

Deadlines

The due dates for all papers are listed below. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of them as well as of dates for presentations and writing workshops. I will allow an automatic 1-day extension for ONE essay, but ask you to please make your request before the deadline has passed. For each day that your assignment is overdue, I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g., A- becomes a B+). Please plan accordingly.

Accessibility and Accommodation

Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by Student Disability Services (SDS) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course should follow the procedures established by SDS for using accommodations. Timely notifications are required in order to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs in this class after you have completed the SDS procedures for requesting accommodations. For more information, visit disabilities.uchicago.edu.

Mental Health and Wellness

Your success in this class and overall wellness at the University is important to me, and I recognize that the transition to college poses challenges to all students. Should you feel in need of mental health or wellness support, remember that you have in place here a network of people who are ready and willing to help. Your College Advisor, your Resident Heads and Resident Assistants, and the staff at Student Counseling are available to you should you need or want to talk. You can find a description of the services offered here: <https://wellness.uchicago.edu/>.

Plagiarism

Your work needs to be your own. The Student Handbook statement on academic honesty is efficient in explicating the point:

It is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another's statements or ideas as one's own work. To do so is plagiarism or cheating, offenses punishable under the University's disciplinary system. Because these offenses undercut the distinctive moral and intellectual character of the University, we take them very seriously. Proper acknowledgment of another's ideas, whether by direct quotation or paraphrase, is expected. In particular, if any written or electronic source is consulted and material is used from that source, directly or indirectly, the source should be identified by author, title, and page number, or by

website and date accessed. Any doubts about what constitutes "use" should be addressed to the instructor.

Cases of academic dishonesty are taken very seriously by the College and by me.

WEEK	TU/TH	TEXT/THEM/READING ASSIGNMENT	WORKSHOPS/SCREENINGS/ PAPERS
1	Jan. 12	Introduction	
	Jan. 14	<i>Mules and Men</i> Part 1, Books 1-5	
2	Jan. 19	Wolfram and Shilling, "Dialects, Standards, and Vernaculars" Appiah, "Identity of Politics"	Essay Prompt 1 distributed
	Jan. 21	<i>Mules and Men</i> Part 1, Books 6-10	
3	Jan. 26	Appiah, "Identity of Politics"	Draft of Paper 1 due on Jan 31.
	Jan. 28	Dante, <i>De vulgari eloquentia</i> , book 1	
4	Feb. 2	Lu Xun (鲁迅), "An Outsider's Chats about Written Language"	Writing Workshop
	Feb. 4	Lu Xun (鲁迅), "An Outsider's Chats about Written Language"	
5	Feb. 9	Sumathy Ramaswamy's "Passions of the Tongue"	Essay 1 due on Feb 7
	Feb. 11	Sumathy Ramaswamy's "Passions of the Tongue"	
6	Feb. 16	Richard Rodríguez, <i>Hunger of Memory</i> (Prologue, Aria)	Essay Prompt 2 distributed
	Feb. 18	Richard Rodríguez, <i>Hunger of Memory</i> (Complexion)	
7	Feb. 23	Richard Rodríguez, <i>Hunger of Memory</i> (Profession, Mr. Secrets)	Writing Workshop
	Feb. 25	Lucy Jones' "Dyke/Girl: Language and Identity in Lesbian Group"	
8	Mar. 2	Discussion of Hannah Gadsby's "Nanette" Zimmon's "Pronoun and Possibilities"	Essay Prompt 3 distributed
	Mar. 4	Junot Diaz's <i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i> , 1-165	
9	Mar. 9	Junot Diaz's <i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i> , 166-335	Writing Workshop
	Mar. 11	Discussion of "Do I sound gay?"	

		Wrap-up	
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