

***Critical Reading and Writing I: Fiction & Nonfiction Prose
On Beauty and Being Just***

Fall 2007

ENGL 111, P2 * Tuesday-Thursday 8:00-9:40 * AQU 302

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*[T]he purpose of a liberal arts education is to give people an enhanced opportunity
to decide how they should live their lives.*

Mark Edmundson, *Why Read?*

*The fundamental job of the imagination in ordinary life is to produce,
out of the society we have to live in, a vision of the society we want to live in.*

Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*

Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity.

It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality.

Novelist Ian McEwan, from *The Guardian*, September 15, 2001

*Most of us have one great difficulty in life, and that is to see ourselves as others see us and to see the other
person as he sees himself. Without that second process, seeing him as he sees himself, not only is sympathy
impossible but understanding is also impossible. . . . That stretching of one's viewpoint towards oneself and
the world and the fragmentation of it sometimes and the final healing of it all into a new synthesis is the
process of growth, in my opinion. People who don't grow are people who can never enter a world which is
not comfortably their own.*

Playwright Arthur Miller, *Psychology and Arthur Miller*

Course Description:

This critical reading and writing course (along with all of the courses of your liberal arts education) is intended to help you to learn to see: to open your eyes and challenge your thinking. This semester we will be reading works of literary prose, both fiction and nonfiction. We'll read three novels and a handful of essays from several collections.

What will we be doing as we read and write? When we read, we will examine ways authors use language to observe, describe, challenge, and envision worlds. And when we write we will practice our own ability to use language powerfully and effectively, to observe, describe, challenge and envision worlds of our own. The processes of reading, writing, and thinking are intertwined and inextricable; reading will deepen your thinking and heighten your sensitivity to writing style, while writing will help you become a more attentive and questioning reader. They are processes through which we think, learn, remake ourselves—not simply means through which we gather information and convey ideas.

What can we expect of one another? You can expect me to read your work closely, to take it (and you) seriously, and to challenge and support you in your development as a reader and writer. In turn, I will expect you to give this course focused energy and commitment. I will expect you to read actively, to formulate questions, articulate observations, and make notes in preparation for class. You are likely to find yourself rereading and rewriting extensively. If you approach the work of this course with an open and active mind, you will find that you will learn a great deal about literature, about language, about the world, and about yourself.

Paired Course and Service Learning: different kinds of learning

We're engaged in a different kind of course here. Two of the most enjoyable and meaningful aspects of this course—interdisciplinarity and community learning--come from our course pairing.

First, this Critical Reading and Writing course is paired with your Introduction to Justice and Peace Studies course. You are encouraged to make connections between what you're learning in our class and in Justice and Peace Studies, and to apply material from one course to the other course.

Second, we're pairing with teachers and students at Lincoln International High School, a charter school in downtown Minneapolis that was founded specially for immigrants and refugees (currently, they're mostly from East African and Latin American countries). One thing that distinguishes our *service-learning* work from volunteer community service is intentional analysis of the dynamics at work in our service and our learning. We will be observing and questioning the intellectual and political connections between the work we do in class—on issues such as the power of language, processes of reading and writing, the development of identity, and how we live in the world—and the work we do in the community.

Practical matters of our LIHS project:

Our pair will attend class at Lincoln on six Tuesdays between October 23 and November 27, during class time. We'll take the St. Thomas shuttle, as the high school is near our Minneapolis campus. We'll divide into two groups and work with two different classes at Lincoln—half of you will work with a history class, the other half with a language arts class—and will do collaborative and individual writing projects with the high school students. You will receive more details and instructions from the teachers at LIHS. On Tuesday, December 4, LIHS students will come here for a final celebration lunch.

Course Materials:

Texts:

George Orwell, *Why I Write*
Jeanette Winterson, *Art Objects*
Chuck Klosterman, *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*
Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*
Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*
Dave Eggers, *What is the What*

Andrea Lunsford, *Easy Writer*

Also pick up:

A composition notebook
Two folders with pockets: one to use for holding all your coursework, the other for submitting essays.

Course Requirements:

6 essays (80%)

3 longer, more complex and multifaceted essays (60%)

You will receive detailed assignment sheets for each of these.

- (20%) An analytic essay on *The Handmaid's Tale*
- (20%) A narrative essay on *What is the What*, related to your experience at Lincoln
- (20%) A reflective essay on beauty and justice, making connections to Justice & Peace Studies

2 shorter, tightly focused essays (20%)

- (10%) A narrative essay in the style of Orwell, hooks, or Winterson on your own literacy, "Why I Write"
- (10%) An analysis of pop culture in the style of Klosterman

Reading Journal (20%)

The journal will include responses to the readings, a recording of ongoing critical questions, in-class writing exercises, and a journal of your experience at Lincoln international high school.

It is a space for “low-stakes writing,” which means that I won’t be evaluating your writing in the journals on spelling or grammar. It’s the space for you to “write to think” or “write to learn.” The journal allows you to raise questions, to wrestle with the texts, to examine your own thoughts and feelings, and to experiment, risk, and fail. Consider this as something you plan to save, as something that will serve as a memento of your journey in your first semester of college.

Bring your journal to class every day. It will be taken up from time to time, unannounced, for grading. When I grade them I will be looking for thoughtfulness and specificity, whether specific, close working with the texts, or specific description and analysis of your learning at Lincoln. ***There is no make-up work for entries not completed, or if you were not in class the day journals were taken up.***

Guidelines for Success:

Get into class, both here at UST and at LIHS. Contribute to class every day. Class is much more lively and enjoyable when everyone participates—both in speaking and listening. Writing classes tend to be more intimate than other kinds of classes, since we’re sharing ideas in progress and our writing reveals our selves. This can make for a class that is especially relevant and stimulating. It can also throw off the whole class if some people are frequently absent, walk in late, don’t participate, or come unprepared. Don’t do that!

Keep up with the reading. The reading load is sometimes heavy and the texts are often complex, but they are always tied to current writing projects, work you’re doing in Justice and Peace Studies, experiences at LIHS, and the world within and around us.

Keep up with the writing. The essay assignments are designed to prevent procrastination and anxious all-nighters. They are also designed to allow you to fail—to experiment, fail, receive feedback, and try again—for this is the only way we ever really learn. Each essay is developed in stages. Journal assignments are the basis of the four shorter essays; if you do thorough and thoughtful work in the journal, you’ll be able to go that much further with the final essay. The two longer essays have time built in for you to re-see and re-think your ideas, to work with classmates, with consultants at the Center for Writing, and with me. Take advantage of this process and complete each stage on time. *Treat the workshop days like science labs, athletics classes, or music practice: come prepared to work.*

Talk with me whenever you need help. Come see me with questions about the reading, consult me about your writing assignments, reflect on your experiences at LIHS. I have office hours every week and am glad to make appointments for other times.

Visit the Center for Writing. The Center for Writing provides one-on-one conferences for you as you write. You can work with a peer consultant at any stage—from interpreting reading assignments, to developing ideas for papers, to drafting the paper, to editing, proofreading, checking grammar and punctuation.

Hours: Mon-Thurs 9-8, Fri 9-12 (also Sundays 6-9 p.m. in OSF library, rm. 102)
Location: JRC 361
Phone: (651) 962-5601
Web: www.stthomas.edu/writing (see “Resources for Writers,” “Ask a Consultant”)

Course Policies:

The university policy is to allow three absences with no penalty. After each third absence your final grade will drop by one-half letter grade (e.g., from a B- to a C+).

In general, it’s a good idea to send me an e-mail if you’re going to miss class. **Talk with me** if you run into serious problems and realize you will be missing more than a week (3 days) of class.

Take note that if you miss a day at Lincoln you also risk disappointing the LIHS students you work with and throwing off the balance of your group there.

No late homework will be accepted. If you are not in class or don’t have your journal when they are taken up, you’ll just receive a zero for that round.

Late essays will be dropped one letter grade for every day they’re overdue.

Plagiarism of any assignment will result in the failure of the assignment, and is grounds for failure of the entire course. If you ever have any doubts about the proper use of others’ ideas and words in your own work, see me and I will be glad to help.

Advice from Former Students:

“Go in with an open mind; you’ll find out a lot about yourself.”

“Don’t be afraid to take risks in your writing.”

“Do the daily writing assignments well. Learning how to write freely has helped me get my ideas and thoughts and impressions down on paper. This skill really helps when it comes to writing papers.”

“Revisions do matter. Having a complete draft the first day it is due allows a great deal of discovery and development.”

“Dig deeper! Get ready to analyze and look into things you never would have imagined even mattered. But be open and don’t be afraid to discuss and you’ll get so much out of it. What you put in, you get out!”

“Take advantage of writing conferences and appreciate all the writing. It will help your writing progress in a positive way.”

Students with Disabilities: Please see me individually to discuss academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability. You are encouraged to register with the Enhancement Program-Disability Services office for disability verification and for determination of academic accommodations. Please do so within the first two weeks of the term. Appointments can be made by calling 651-962-6315 or 800-328-6819, extension 6315. Telephone appointments are available as needed. You may also make an appointment in O’Shaughnessy Educational Center, room 119. For further information, you can locate the Enhancement Program on the web at <http://www.stthomas.edu/enhancementprog/>.

Reading Schedule (subject to change)

All readings and writing assignments are due on the day listed.

Why do you write? Why do you read?

Week 1

H 9/6 Why are we here? What are we doing this semester?
On beauty and being just: what are the connections?

Week 2

T 9/11 Orwell, "Why I Write"; hooks, from *Teaching to Transgress* (photocopy); and
Winterson, "Writer, Reader, Words" (esp. pp. 25-28, 34-36, 39-40, 42-44)
Journal: Why do you write? What has been your own reading and writing
journey? What do you tend to gravitate towards in your favorite works?

H 9/13 **Essay 1 due: "Why I Write" * read aloud in class**

Week 3

T 9/18 Klosterman, "This is Emo"

H 9/20 Klosterman, "What Happens When People Stop Being Polite"

Week 4

T 9/25 **Essay 2 due: pop culture analysis * read aloud in class**

H 9/27 *The Handmaid's Tale*

Week 5 **COMMON TEXT WEEK**

**** (attending one of the Common Text events is required; others are extra credit)****

T 10/2 *The Handmaid's Tale*

12:00-1:00 p.m. – leather room, OSF library – Student panel on *The Handmaid's Tale*

W 10/3 7:30-9:00 p.m. – JRC 126 – Showing of clips from the film version of *The Handmaid's Tale* along with discussion of issues of adaptation from page to screen

H 10/5 *The Handmaid's Tale* --- drafting workshop

3:30-5:00 p.m. – MHC 304 – Workshop on "Could this happen here?"

Week 6

T 10/9 *The Kite Runner* – guest speaker on Afghanistan: Tom Gouttierre
(Meet in AQU 301!)

H 10/11 *The Kite Runner*

Week 7

T 10/16 finish *The Kite Runner*

H 10/18 **orientation to Lincoln International High School with Chris Nevin**

Week 8

T 10/23

First day at Lincoln * Journal exercise on DESCRIPTION
The Handmaid's Tale essays due

H 10/25

What is the What

Week 9

T 10/30

Second day at Lincoln * Journal exercise on ANALYSIS

H 11/1

What is the What

Week 10

T 11/6

Third day at Lincoln * Journal exercise on ANALYSIS

H 11/8

What is the What

Week 11

T 11/13

Fourth day at Lincoln * Journal exercise on INTEGRATION

H 11/15

What is the What * drafting workshop

Week 12

T 11/20

Fifth day at Lincoln * Journal exercise on INTEGRATION
***What is the What* essay drafts due!**

H 11/22

NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Week 13

T 11/27

Sixth day at Lincoln * Journal exercise on REFLECTION

H 11/29

Essays due! * **read aloud parts in class**
Reflections on Lincoln experience

Week 14

T 12/4

Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"

****lunch with LIHS students, 11:30-1:15****

H 12/6

Winterson, "Art Objects"

Week 15

T 12/11

Drafts of beauty and justice essay due for revision workshop

H 12/13

Reflective essay on beauty and justice due * **read aloud in class**
Course evaluations