

ENGL 206: Aims and Tasks

Each section of ENGL 206 will include an array of texts relating to a particular global theme. It will have two primary pedagogical aims, working in concert: developing students' skill in literary analysis; and helping students cross the distance between their assumptions and those embodied in works from other cultures. Through their developing competence in textual analysis students will become aware of the differences and connections between cultures, as well as increasingly conscious of the culturally conditioned assumptions which govern their own lives.

ENGL 206 will offer students both historical and contemporary texts, inevitably differing in their uses of language, their deployment of literary conventions, and their ideological assumptions. Because of its global emphasis, the course will also challenge students with texts from other cultures and sometimes with texts that redefine their understanding of what constitutes "literature." Each section will use diverse textual forms as course texts.

As a course in literary studies, ENGL 206 will deal systematically with the four main dimensions of literature as an art form: the pleasures literature offers, the role of the reader in creating meaning, the formal and social aspects of language in literary texts, and the ways in which social contexts — the writer's and the reader's — shape our perceptions and uses of literature. The course will treat literature as both a product and a part of the complex processes through which people create structures of meaning.

Although each section of ENGL 206 will focus on a selected global theme or issue, that theme or issue will be treated from multiple viewpoints, emphasizing the value of a broad-based methodological approach to global issues. Looking at how different texts approach a common theme or issue will introduce students to how interpretive codes vary from one culture to another, sensitizing them to the importance of context in constructing meaning from texts. The course will invite (encourage, urge) students to cross the distance between their assumptions and those implied by works from previous times or other cultures. To fill that gap, students will have to make their assumptions explicit and recognize those assumptions as culturally conditioned. Mary Louise Pratt coined the phrase "contact zone" to identify "the space in which [texts] geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations" (*Imperial Eyes*). The idea of the contact zone is the guiding principle for all sections of ENGL 206. Pratt adds, "A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and 'travelees,' not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices." Students should have practice in playing the role of cultural critic, reading for insights into other cultures and reflecting on the assumptions and values of their own. Though they will achieve varying degrees of success in this role, they should realize that the role requires being conscious of the social construction of knowledge, the implications of our own constructions, and the ways texts are used to maintain and challenge those constructions.

Like all introductory literature courses, it will devote considerable attention to close reading. Through discussion, tests, and writing assignments, it will repeatedly ask students to work their way through a variety of texts, distinguishing between the significant and the trivial, the relevant and the irrelevant. They will also have specific assignments in ENGL 206 which require the use of library resources. Just as important, The course will invite students to discover that what a reader finds significant in a given work depends in part on what that reader expects, wants, and needs. Finally, it will encourage students to recognize that complex questions are preferable to simplistic answers.

Aims

- I. Introduce students to the disciplined reading of literary texts, emphasizing the pleasures literature offers, the role of the reader in creating meaning, the formal and social aspects of language in literary texts, and the ways in which social contexts — the writer's and the reader's — shape our perceptions and uses of literature. The course will treat literature as both a product and a part of the complex processes through which people create structures of meaning.
- II. Encourage students to become aware of the differences and connections between cultures, as well as increasingly conscious of the culturally conditioned assumptions which govern their own lives

Tasks

- A. Students should have practice playing the role of cultural critic, reading for insights into other cultures and reflecting on the assumptions and values of their own. Though they will achieve varying degrees of success in this role, they should realize that the role requires being conscious of the social construction of knowledge, the implications of our own constructions, and the ways texts are used to maintain and challenge those constructions.
- B. Students should recognize common textual forms and be able to describe, in general, the challenges of reading various textual forms. For example, they should be able to talk intelligently about how reading a poem differs from reading a story, a film, or an artifact of material culture.
- C. Students should recognize that interpretive codes differ from one culture to another, and should be able to describe the importance of context in constructing the meaning of a text. For example, students should be able to identify a text which raises cross-cultural interpretive problems and characterize those problems (e. g. Achebe on *Heart of Darkness*).
- D. Students should learn a technical vocabulary appropriate to the textual forms they encounter that enables them to perform the fundamental analytic tasks of critical reading.
- E. Students should have extended practice in close reading.
- F. Students should have specific assignments which require the use of library resources.
- G. Students should be able to identify a number of authors/artists and texts outside of Anglo-European cultural traditions.

Stipulations

1. an array of texts relating to a particular global theme
2. both historical and contemporary texts
3. texts from cultures other than Western European
4. diverse textual forms as course texts

Individual sections of ENGL 206 may be writing intensive, speaking intensive, or both, at the instructor's discretion as long as the instructor first obtains endorsement from the appropriate College committee.