

Note to prospective Spring 2019 students: This is the syllabus for the course **as it was taught last year**. I will be making changes to this before the start of the Spring 2019 semester, but it will likely remain similar to what is below. The biggest change I am considering is adding a contemporary novel in addition to the four historical ones. There will also be a required blog posting component instead of the index card responses. You should expect to do up to 200 pages of reading a week on heavy reading weeks, which compose about eight-ten weeks of the semester. **You should take this course if you look forward to reading the course texts and enjoy reading in general.**

GESM 120g Section 35333, Seminar in Humanistic Inquiry (GE-B)

Spring 2018 / T/TH 9:30-10:50 in GFS 229

Tell Me A Story: American Novels that Made a Difference

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Course Description

Legend has it that when Abraham Lincoln met Harriet Beecher Stowe he exclaimed, “So you’re the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war!” This story about a story has helped make *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) the paradigmatic example of the novel that changed the world. In this course we will explore this and other novels that had an impact on the world around them. We will try to determine how to tell if a novel can, did, or will make a difference and map the relationship between fiction writing and social change. We will also explore if novels do political work in our era – what historian Robert Darnton has called the fourth great information age – or if the proliferation of other types of text has rendered them insolvent. In other words, can (or should) the novel-as-change-agent survive in the face of Twitter?

The course will focus primarily on close reading, a hallmark of reading critically in a college context. However, we will depend on contemporary reviews to assess the reception of each text in its historical moment. Because we are exploring how art affects society, we will also move outside of the humanities into the sciences and social sciences. Scholars in a wide range of fields are increasingly exploring how fiction has played a role in human development. Researchers are studying how literary devices, like metaphors and other figurative language, affect the brain, and psychologists have found that reading fiction makes people more empathetic, an idea with obvious implications for social movements. Perhaps, as the subtitle of literary scholar Jonathan Gottschall’s book *The Storytelling Animal*, puts it, “stories make us human.”

Learning Objectives

USC’s Humanistic Inquiry program will introduce you to a broad range of courses and ways of thinking that will take you beyond the specialization of your major and significantly extend your ability to understand the human world and your place in it. The program will help you achieve six principal learning objectives, which are bulleted below. The italicized sentences under each bullet explain how our specific course will help you to meet these more general objectives.

- Reflect on what it means to be human through close study of human experience

throughout time and across diverse cultures

In our course this will include studying influential stories and how they reflect and/or shape human experience in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century.

- Cultivate a critical appreciation for various forms of human expression, including literature, language, philosophy, and the arts, as well as develop an understanding of the contexts from which these forms emerge

In our course we will critically engage with literary texts and their historical contexts in order to explore their influence. There will be opportunities to expand our analyses and hypotheses beyond literature to the visual and performing arts.

- Engage with lasting ideas and values that have animated humanity throughout the centuries for a more purposeful, more ethical, and intellectually richer life

In our course we will discuss the power, privilege, and responsibility of the writer and examine what values, if any, can be translated or taught through fiction.

- Learn to read and interpret actively and analytically, to think critically and creatively, and to write and speak persuasively

You will be encouraged throughout the semester to make and defend arguments about the course texts. All of the index card entries and class discussions will be focused on active and analytic reading and critical and creative thinking. The midterm exam, the final exam, and the final project will all require persuasive responses.

- Learn to evaluate ideas from multiple perspectives and to formulate informed opinions on complex issues of critical importance in today's global world

This course specifically asks you to begin to think about how social change happens and the role that art has, can, and should play in that change. If you are a producer and/or consumer of art in any form, this should be of interest and importance to you. The multiple perspectives in this course will be from your classmates and from critical responses to texts, both from when they were published and more recently. Your final project will ask you to choose a complex issue of critical importance and develop a hypothesis about fiction's potential to address it.

Course Texts and Materials*

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Norton Critical 2nd Edition.

Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (1906). Norton Critical Edition.

Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957). Penguin Modern Classics.

Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying* (1973). Penguin 40th Anniversary Edition.

Toni Morrison, "Recitatif" (1983). [available on Blackboard]

Louis Menand, "Books as Bombs." (*The New Yorker*, Jan. 24, 2011) [available on Blackboard]

"Men Explain *Lolita* to Me" by Rebecca Solnit (*Literary Hub*, Dec. 17, 2015) [available on Blackboard]

Viewings:

Philadelphia

KONY 2012

Additional texts determined by you (and perhaps by me based on class discussions)

One package of lined **4 x 6** index cards

A notebook and writing utensil for note taking

*Please always bring your texts to class on the days we'll be discussing them.

Course Requirements

- **Index Card Entries (ICE): 25%**

For each class period you will be expected to bring a 4 x 6 index card with a substantive response to the reading for that class period. The purpose of these cards is two-fold: to ensure that you've done and engaged deeply with the reading for the day, and to spur class discussion. Most of the time you will be able to decide how to use the card to engage with the text. Some options include: asking specific questions about the text, making connections between the texts and other readings or class discussions, evaluating the effectiveness of the text, analyzing your response to the text in the context of the text's ability to effect social change, indicating a problem you have with the text, identifying a relevant or important passage and interpreting it, or tying the text to its historical context; reflections will not receive credit if they simply summarize the reading. Other times I may provide a prompt at the end of the class period before and you'll respond to that prompt on the index card. ICEs will also sometimes be used as conversation starters in class – I may choose them at random to read out loud or you may swap them with your peers, so consider the audience for these cards me and the entire class.

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is that you do the reading for this course; if I find that isn't happening, I reserve the right to institute pop quizzes on the reading that count toward this 25% of your grade.

ICEs will be graded on an exceptional (check plus/A), acceptable (check/B), and weak (check minus/C) basis. If you submit a response that proves that you have done the reading and engages actively with the text in some way (i.e. is not simply a summary) you will receive a check. If you go far above and beyond in your analysis or engagement, you will get a check plus, and if you simply summarize the reading or are obviously phoning it in, you'll get a check minus. If it's not clear from the ICE that you have read or thought about the reading, you won't receive credit.

- **Participation/Thursday Thoughts: 5%**

This is a freshman SEMINAR, which means your attendance, participation, and preparation are vital components of the success of each class period and the course as a whole, not to mention your success as a student in the course. You should come to each class prepared and ready to actively participate. Active participation includes verbal contributions to discussions, engagement both with what I am saying and your classmates' comments, focused work in small group and partner activities, and thoughtful completion of in-class writing. We will often be discussing sensitive topics, so please be respectful when voicing your opinions. If you are ever uncomfortable about a class discussion, come and talk to me immediately.

Each Thursday we'll start class with a specific student or two students sharing their "Thursday Thoughts" about the assigned readings. This can be an extension of your ICE entry or something else that you are just thinking about, but the point is to make sure that we are talking about things that are interesting to you, not just to me (or, more likely, in addition to me). You will sign up for these Thursday Thoughts and you should come prepared not just with brief

comments or ideas but also with a couple of questions or specific things (passages from the text, plot points, dialogue, new characters, etc.) you want to discuss with your peers.

- **Community Engagement/Reflection: 5%**

Because general education is most effective when applied not only in the classroom but also outside it, you will be attending an event on or around campus and reflecting on its connection to our course themes and class discussions. Most Visions and Voices events will count, as will visits to local museums/galleries; more information will be provided in class.

- **Powerful Text Presentation/Discussion Leadership: 15%**

In the middle of the semester, you all will take over assigning the course readings. In pairs or groups of three you'll nominate a "powerful text" that you think has or could be influential in some way in the world. Your text doesn't have to be written, although of course it can be. It could be a photograph, a painting, a film, a tv show, a series of tweets, a tumblr post, a gif...use your imagination. You'll assign an excerpt of said text (if it's quite long) to your classmates, or you'll simply share the entire text ahead of time, and then you'll lead the class discussion of that text. You should keep this search for powerful texts on your radar throughout the semester, as it will be much easier to do this if you have some authentic options to share with your group rather than having to scramble at the last minute.

- **In-Class Midterm Exam: 10%**

- **Take-Home Final Exam (cumulative, but weighted toward the second half of the semester): 10%**

Both the midterm and the final exam will ask you to engage with the driving questions of the course, namely to what extent literature has the power to influence social change, how and why, by drawing on the course texts up to that point. It will serve you well, then, to be thinking about, and perhaps recording some ideas about, these questions as you read throughout the semester.

- **Final Project (8-10 pages total): 30%**

- **Proposal: 5%**

- **Final Paper (6-8 pages): 25%**

In preparation for the final project, which will be due at the end of the semester, you will select a contemporary movement for social change (or social issue that you feel needs a movement to address it) and investigate the role fiction has or could play in its origins or development. Proposals will lay out your rationale for choosing this movement/issue, your research plan, and a preliminary bibliography. Final projects will draw from the discoveries of the research; you may write an analytical paper describing your findings or you can propose an alternate creative or critical project. For example, you could create or plan a work of art you think would be a productive addition to the contemporary social movement you researched. Creative final projects must be accompanied by critical commentary and analysis. Students can also move away from literature for this final project and apply some of the driving questions of the course to other forms of art, asking how visual, dramatic, public, musical or other arts have or might also make a difference (or not).

Expectations and Policies

- **Attendance**

Although I expect you to be in every class, if necessary, you can miss two class periods over the course of the semester with no penalty. There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences, so plan accordingly. This means that it doesn't matter to me if you miss class because

you are sick, overslept, had to travel, etc., but after two missed classes your grade will suffer. So if you oversleep a couple of times at the beginning of the semester, and then get legitimately sick at the end, you will still be penalized for the days you missed because of illness. As per university policy, you will not be penalized for absences for religious holidays and university-sponsored events with proper documentation.

For every class period you miss beyond these two, two percentage points will be deducted from your final grade. More than six absences may result in failure of the course.

If you need to miss a class, please email me in advance and make sure you get in touch with a classmate and ask about what you missed and also check Blackboard for any handouts or materials. It's also very good practice, not just for this course, but for others, to come to office hours and discuss what you've missed.

If you email me whatever is due on the day that you are absent before class that day, you can still receive credit for that work. (You can type up an ICE, drop off the index card in my box, or send me a picture of it.) If you don't, you will not receive credit. Because we are reading sections of novels over the course of several class periods, you need to keep up with the reading even if you miss class.

Lateness, no matter if it's one minute or ten minutes, is distracting and disruptive to the entire class. Please don't be late. Three lates will count as an absence.

- **Email**

I will answer every email I receive within 24 hours (Monday-Friday) or 48 hours (Saturday-Sunday), often much sooner. If you do not receive an email response from me within those parameters, it means I did not receive your email. Please use your USC email address to correspond with me; mail from non-USC addresses often winds up in my spam folder. Make sure you are checking your USC email frequently, since that's how I will communicate with you, and read any emails from me carefully – they will contain important course information.

- **Office Hours**

Come to them to discuss readings, ideas, your writing, etc. In addition to my formal office hours, I am usually on campus on Wednesday and Friday afternoons, and sometimes on Friday mornings (although these times aren't guaranteed, so you should email me if you want to meet then) and I am sometimes available other times if you email me to make an appointment. I prefer to meet in person, but if that can't happen I am available via Skype, FaceTime and Google Hangout.

- **Laptops/Cell Phones**

Laptops are not allowed in class unless I specifically request that you bring them for an in-class activity. Recent studies have shown that laptop use in lecture settings is often distracting not just for the person with the screen but for people around them as well. In our smaller class setting, having screens in front of you creates a barrier, both physical and mental, that can impede discussion. Studies have also found that you learn and retain more when you take notes by hand rather than by typing; I strongly encourage you to take notes by hand during our class.

Please keep phones off/silent and away at all times during class. Your engagement during our classes necessitates that you refrain from texting and/or looking at your phone during class.

- **Plagiarism and Academic Integrity**

USC highly values academic integrity and plagiarism undermines this integrity. A plagiarized assignment will receive an "F" and may result in failure of the course. We will discuss in class what constitutes plagiarism, but just remember: if you're not sure, cite it or ask me.

- **Mandated Reporting**

As per university policy, I am a mandated reporter, which means if I suspect that a student who is under 18 is experiencing abuse or neglect, including sexual abuse, I am mandated by law to report it to USC's Department of Public Safety and the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services. I am also a responsible employee under Title IX, which means I must immediately report all known information about suspected prohibited conduct to the Title IX Office. Prohibited conduct encompasses harassment and discrimination, and is defined in more detail here: <https://policy.usc.edu/student-misconduct/>.

Additional Support

- **The Writing Center**

The Writing Center (located in THH 216) offers writing workshops and half-hour, one-on-one appointments with trained consultants. The staff is there to help you at *any* stage of the writing process, including the beginning – you don't need a full draft to utilize their support. You can make appointments via their website: <http://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/>

- **Students with Disabilities:**

Any student requesting accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification can be obtained from DSP; please make sure that this letter is delivered to me as soon as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and can be contacted at (213) 740-0776.

Support Systems:

- *Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

- *National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

- *Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

- *Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

- *Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

- *Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

- *Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

- *Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

- *USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

- *USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.*

Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Readings are due on the day that they listed below.

If there is a reading or viewing due, there is also an ICE due for that day.

Week 1

Tues. Jan. 9: Course Overview

Thurs. Jan. 11: Diagnostic/Preview *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Sign up for Thursday Thoughts

Due before class: email me the answers to the following questions/prompts:

Why did you sign up for this specific GE seminar?

What do you hope to get out of this course?

Tell me something interesting about yourself.

Do you have any questions for me? If so, ask away.

Week 2

Due Tues. Jan. 16: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Vol. I, chapters 1-10 (pages 1-93)

Due Thurs. Jan. 18: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Vol. I, chapters 11-18 (pages 93-199)

Week 3

Due Tues. Jan. 23: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Vol. II, chapters 19-30 (pages 200-306)

Due Thurs. Jan. 25: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Vol. II, chapters 31-45 (pages 306-408)

Week 4

Due Tues. Jan. 30: "Everybody's Protest Novel" by James Baldwin (pages 532-538)

Debrief UTC/Preview *The Jungle*/ Discuss Powerful Text assignment/rubric

Due Thurs. Feb. 1: *The Jungle*, chapters 1-9 (pages 5-89)

Week 5

Due Tues. Feb. 6: *The Jungle* chapters 10-17 (pages 90-165)

Powerful Text nominations/group determinations

Due Thurs. Feb. 8: *The Jungle*, chapters 18-25 (pages 166-251)

Week 6

Due Tues. Feb. 13: *The Jungle*, chapters 26-31 (pages 251-328)

Assign debate teams

Due Thurs. Feb. 15: Debate: *The Jungle* vs. UTC/Review for Midterm (No ICE due)

Week 7

Due Tues. Feb. 20: "Books as Bombs" by Louis Menand (*The New Yorker*, Jan. 24, 2011)

"Men Explain *Lolita* to Me" by Rebecca Solnit (*Literary Hub*, Dec. 17, 2015)

Thurs. Feb. 22: Midterm

Week 8

Due Tues. Feb. 27: "Recitatif" by Toni Morrison

Due Thurs. Mar. 1: Read or watch nominated powerful texts from groups 1 & 2 (No ICE due)

Week 9

Due Tues. Mar. 6: Read or watch nominated powerful texts from groups 3 & 4 (No ICE due)

Due Thurs. Mar. 8: Read or watch nominated powerful texts from groups 5 & 6 (No ICE due)

We do not have class on Mar. 13 and 15 because of spring break.

Week 10

Due Tues. Mar. 20: *On the Road* Part One (pages 1-108)

Due Thurs. Mar. 22: *On the Road* Part Two (pages 109-178)

Discuss Final Project Assignment/Rubric

Week 11

Due Tues. Mar. 27: *On the Road* Parts Three, Four and Five (pages 179-307)

Class will not be held on Thurs. Mar. 29.

Week 12

Due Tues. Apr. 3: Final Project Proposal Due (bring two paper copies); in-class peer review

Due Thurs. Apr. 5: *Fear of Flying*, chapters 1-9 (pages 1-155)

Week 13

Due Tues. Apr. 10: *Fear of Flying*, chapters 10-19 (pages 156-299)

Thurs. Apr. 12: Revisit role of genre/medium in power of texts (Will & Grace effect); preview next week's films; return/discuss final project proposals

Week 14

Due Tues. Apr. 17: Watch *Philadelphia* (1993)*

Due Thurs. Apr. 19: Watch *KONY 2012**

*These viewings may change based on powerful text choices.

Due by class time on Thurs. Apr. 19: Community Engagement and Reflection assignment (via Turnitin on Blackboard)

Week 15

Due Tues. Apr. 24: Describe a current text that exists (if you are doing a critical final project, it could be your final project text) that you think has the potential to make a difference. Your description should describe the text to someone who's never heard of it and explain why you think it has potential. (This should be no longer than one-page single-spaced and needs to be printed out and brought to class.) (This is instead of an ICE.)

Thurs. Apr. 26: Farewell thoughts, review for Final Exam, course evaluations

Thurs. May 3 by 11:59 pm: Final Project due via Turnitin on Blackboard

Tues. May 8 by 10 am: Take-Home Final Exam due via Turnitin on Blackboard