**Please note: This is the syllabus from last spring to give you a sense of the course and the expectations. While the syllabus for Spring 2023 will likely be very similar to this, I may change aspects of the course, including the readings, based on current events and/or pedagogical exigencies. The part of the syllabus that is highlighted in yellow was determined by the students in last semester; that section will be determined by you and your peers this semester and as such those texts will be different.**

**I’m happy to answer any other questions about the course via email.**

**GESM 120g Sections 35331 Seminar in Humanistic Inquiry (GE-B)**

**Spring 2022 / T/Th 9:30-10:50**

**Tell Me A Story: American Novels that Made a Difference**

Jessica Wells Cantiello, Ph.D.

[jessica.cantiello@usc.edu](mailto:jessica.cantiello@usc.edu)

**Office Hours: *by appointment via zoom***

*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 blog entries and class discussions will be focused on active and analytic reading and critical and creative thinking. The midterm 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.*

*Required Novels\**

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Norton Critical 3rd 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.

There are a numbers of additional required texts available on Blackboard, and there is a possibility you may need to purchase texts for the powerful texts that you all determine.

\*It makes discussion significantly easier if we are all reading the same edition, but if that’s not possible it is on you to stay abreast of the conversation with the edition you have.

*Course Requirements*

* **Blog entries: due every day we have a reading or viewing 30 minutes before class (20%)**

For each class period you will be expected to post on the blog with a substantive response to the reading for that class period. The purpose of these posts 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 post 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; posts will not receive credit if they simply summarize the reading or if they are too vague to show that you have actually read. Occasionally I may provide a prompt at the end of the class period before or via email and you’ll respond to that prompt on the blog. Posts will often be used as conversation starters in class; particularly strong posts that occasion a lengthy class discussion will contribute positively toward your participation grade.

Blog posts should be around 300 words (250-350). You can start your own thread, or you can respond directly to someone else. Either way, you are responsible for adding something to the conversation. Blog posts that mostly repeat what someone else has said will not receive credit. This means you will need to peruse the other entries before posting your own; if someone has already engaged with what you wanted to discuss, you can respond directly to them, adding your own insights or, perhaps, disagreeing.

You can prepare blog posts as far in advance as you’d like, but please wait until after the class period *before* the post is due to post them. (This will ensure everyone will see your post and know what class period it’s for.)

You are not expected to read anything *about* the readings outside of class; in fact, I prefer you don’t. That said, if you do, please mention and link to it in the post (and it’s ok if it’s not an academic source).

Blog posts will be graded on 2 point scale: a post that proves you read, isn’t just a summary, and adds something to the blog conversation will receive a 2, a post that does most of these things but isn’t perfect will receive a 1, and a post that doesn’t do those things won’t receive any credit. I do not accept late posts, as I use them to plan for the day’s class session. You are expected to post even if you will not be in class. At the end of the semester, I add up the points you’ve earned, divide them by the total number of points you could have earned and convert that percentage into the 20% of your final grade.

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 portion of your grade.

* **Participation: 5%**

This is a first-year 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, contact me immediately.

* **Midterm Exam: 20%**

The midterm will consist of short and long answer free response questions with choice for each section. Provided we are in-person, it will be an in-class written exam.

* **Powerful Text Video Presentation (15%) and Discussion Leadership (10%): 25%**

After the midterm, you all will take over assigning the course readings. In small groups 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 or fictional, although of course it can be. It could be a photograph, a painting, a film, a tv show, a series of tweets, an album, 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 you’ll create a Text and Context recorded presentation and lead the class discussion of that text. You should keep this search for powerful texts on your radar throughout the first half of the semester, as it will be much easier to do this if we have some authentic options to choose from rather than having to scramble at the last minute.

* **Final Project: 30%**
  + **Proposal (3-5 pages + bibliography)**
  + **Final Paper (6-8 pages)/Creative Piece + Explanation: 25%**
  + **Reflection on Course Content: 5% (2-3 pages)**

The final project asks you to either: (a) write an essay in which you make an argument for how and why a specific piece of art, text and/or literature can or cannot make a difference in addressing your chosen contemporary issue or (b) create a piece of art, text and/or literature that you think would potentially help address your chosen contemporary issue and explain why. The project gives you the opportunity to synthesize our conversations and readings from the semester. It also allows you, if you’d like, to 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).

**The final project is due at 10 am on Tues. May 10.**

*Expectations and Policies*

* **Attendance**

If you need to miss a class, please email me in advance, watch the video if the class was recorded, and check Blackboard for any handouts or materials.

If you post on the blog and/or email me whatever is due on the day that you are absent before class that day, you can still receive credit for that work. If you don’t, you will not receive credit. Because we are reading sections of novels over the course of several class periods, you will need to keep up with the reading even if you miss class or a blog post.

Lateness, no matter if it’s one minute or ten minutes, is distracting and disruptive to the entire class. Please don’t be late.

* **Participation**

Please keep your cameras on during class. (You are welcome to use a virtual background if you’d like.) That said, if there is a reason you need to turn off your video, please let me know via chat and follow up via email; I’d rather have you participating via audio or chat than not at all. Please treat our zoom classroom with the same professionalism and respect you would our in-person classroom: appear presentably, sit upright, avoid distracting or disruptive behavior and mute yourself when appropriate.

When we return to campus I will let you know my most up-to-date policy on attending in-person classes via zoom.

* **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**

Please email me to make an appointment for office hours, which will be held on zoom in my personal meeting room, and can be accessed via the zoom links on Blackboard. My best availability is between 9 am and 2 pm on Mondays and Fridays, but I am available other times as well. I strongly encourage you to discuss the major projects with me but I am also happy to extend class discussions or just chat! Don’t be a stranger.

* **Laptops/Cell Phones**

If we were in an in-person classroom setting, I wouldn’t allow laptop use in most circumstances; the pre-COVID version of this syllabus read, “Recent studies have shown that laptop use in a lecture setting is often distracting not just for the person with the screen but for people around them as well. In our small 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.” I, too, am chuckling at the stark differential between then and now. That said, I kept this section in to implore you to remain as focused as possible during our class sessions by keeping your phones out of reach and silencing any background noise (both literal and figurative) or other interactions on your screens.

* **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 reportall 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 offers virtual 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 can be contacted at (213) 740-0776.

*Support Systems*

* This [**document**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Qn5lawN325NbB1xN60qr8twiikxRGroKRDqMJUqQZZg/edit)has the most up-to-date information about financial and technology assistance for students (and, in some cases, faculty and staff) during COVID. (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Qn5lawN325NbB1xN60qr8twiikxRGroKRDqMJUqQZZg/edit>)
* **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](https://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](http://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](https://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](http://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](http://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](https://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](https://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](https://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](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu/)

*Schedule of Readings and Assignments*

If there is a reading or viewing due, there is also a blog post due for that day by 30 minutes before class (preferably further in advance if possible).

Texts without page numbers are uploaded on Blackboard.

**Tues. Jan 11**: Course Overview

Due **Thurs. Jan. 13**: 1) View the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* Text and Context Video and take notes on it wherever you keep class notes.

2) Email me the answers to the following questions/prompts:

1) Why did you sign up for this specific GE seminar?

2) What do you hope to get out of this course?

3) Tell me something interesting about yourself.

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

Due **Tues. Jan. 18**: Read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin,* Vol. I, chapters 1-10 (pages 11-103)

Due **Thurs. Jan. 20**: Read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Vol. I, chapters 11-18 (pages 103-209)

Due **Tues. Jan. 25**: Read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Vol. II, chapters 19-30 (pages 210-316)

Due **Thurs. Jan. 27**:Read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Vol. II, chapters 31-45 (pages 316-418)

Due **Tues. Feb. 1**: 1) Read “From *Life of Josiah Henson*” by Josiah Henson (pages 436-445 in the Norton Critical Second Edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*)

2) Read “A Slave Auction Described by a Slave” [from *Twelve Years a Slave*] by Solomon Northrup (pages 445-447 in the Norton Critical 3rd Edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*)

3) Review the Powerful Text assignment/rubric

Due **Thurs. Feb. 3**: 1) Read “Everybody’s Protest Novel” by James Baldwin (pages 547-554 in the Norton Critical 3rd Edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*)

2) Review the optional readings folder with an eye toward powerful text nomination

3) Optional but *highly* recommended: post one or more nominations for a powerful text on Blackboard, with a link if possible, and a brief explanation of why it’s potentially powerful

Due **Tues. Feb. 8**: 1) View *The Jungle* Text and Context video

2) Read *The Jungle*, chapters 1-8 (pages 5-89)

3) Fill out the Powerful Text Preferences Sheet

Due **Thurs. Feb 10**: Read *The Jungle* chapters 9-17 (pages 90-165)

Due **Tues. Feb. 15**: Read *The Jungle*, chapters 18-25 (pages 166-250)

Due **Thurs. Feb. 17**: 1) Read *The Jungle*, chapters 26-31 (pages 251-328)

2) Read excerpts from the *Appeal to Reason* version of *The Jungle* (pages 331-344)

Due **Tues. Feb. 22**: Post debate prep in your journal (in lieu of a blog post)

**Thurs. Feb. 24: Midterm**

Due **Tues. Mar. 1**: Read Toni Morrison, “Recitatif” (1983)

\*Please do not look up anything about this story before class\*

Due **Thurs. Mar. 3**: Come prepared to work with your powerful text group on your presentation

**Tues.** **Mar. 8**: No class: work on presentations

Text and Context Video due from *Don’t Look Up* and *The Social Dilemma* group by end of class

**Thurs.** **Mar. 10**: No class: Text and Context Videos due from *Hamilton* and *Beautiful Boy* by the end of class time

Optional conferences to be held in normal class room: *Hamilton* at 10:00 am, *Don’t Look Up* at 10:30 am

**Tues.** **Mar. 15 and Thurs. Mar. 17**: No class/Spring Break

Due **Tues. Mar. 22**: 1) View Text and Context Video about *Hamilton* (on Disney+)

2) Read or watch *Hamilton* (blog post due for everyone *except* presenters)

Due **Thurs. Mar. 24**: 1) View Text and Context Video about *The Social Dilemma* (on Netflix)

2) Read or watch *The Social Network* (on Netflix) (blog post due for everyone *except* presenters)

Due **Tues. Mar. 29**: 1) View Text and Context Video about *Don’t Look Up* (on Netflix)

2) Read or watch Group 4’s nominated powerful text (blog post due for everyone *except* presenters)

Due **Thurs. Mar. 31**: 1) View Text and Context Video about *Beautiful Boy* (on Prime Video)

2) Read or watch Group 1’s nominated powerful text (blog post due for everyone *except* presenters)

3) Review Final Project Assignment/Rubric

By **Sun. Apr. 3 at 8 pm:** Post post-presentation reflection in your journal

Due **Tues. Apr. 5**: 1) View *On the Road* Text and Context video

2) Read *On the Road* Part One (pages 1-108)

Due **Thurs. Apr. 7**: 1) Read the summary of *On the Road* parts two and three (or, optionally, Read *On the Road* Parts Two and Three)

2) Read *On the Road* Parts Four and Five (pages 249-307)

Due **Tues. Apr. 12**: 1) View *Fear of Flying* Text and Contextvideo

2) Read *Fear of Flying*, chapters 1-9 (pages 1-155) [chapters 4, 6 and 9 optional]

Due **Thurs. Apr. 14**: Read *Fear of Flying Fear of Flying,* chapters 10-19 (pages 156-299) [chapters 12-14 optional]

Due **Tues. Apr. 19:** 1) Watch Research Video and Review Class Research Guide

2) Upload Final Project Proposal

Due **Thurs. Apr. 21:** 1) Read “Does Fiction Have the Power to Sway Politics?” by Mohsin Hamed and Francine Prose (*The New York Times* Feb. 17, 2015)

2) View “Book Review Live: The Politics of Fiction” which aired Sept. 16, 2020

3) Read excerpts from “Stand up” in *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* by Cathy Park Hong (pay special attention to pages 55-57; book is available online from the USC Libraries)

Due **Tues. Apr. 26**: TBD

Due **Thurs. Apr. 28**: Post debate prep in your journal (in lieu of a blog post)

Final project is due at 10 am on **Tues. May 10**. Extensions may be granted upon request.