

SPRING 2010 SEMESTER
ENGLISH 469 — SECTION 01
TIME: Tu-Th 9:00
RM: EVANS 262

Course Title: Native American Literatures
Instructor: Drew Lopenzina
Office: Evans 463
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Office Hours:

Texts:

(available at SHSU Bookstore)
The Toughest Indian in the World, Sherman Alexie
A Son of the Forest, William Apress
The Truth about Stories, Thomas King,
Prison Writings: My Life is My Sundance Leonard Peltier
Grass Dancer, Susan Power
Ceremony, Leslie Marmon Silko

Available from Web Sources:

American Indian Stories, Zitkala-Sa

*We knew that stories were like medicine, that a story told one way
could cure, that the same story told another way could injure.*

Thomas King

*But spring is floating/ to the canyon,
needles burst yellow/from the sugar pine;
the stories have built a new house.*

Wendy Rose

Course Objectives:

- Gain knowledge of the rich tradition of Native culture and literature.
- Encourage an appreciation for literary and cultural encounters.
- Foster strong strategies and techniques for critical reading and writing.
- Develop strategies for critical independent thinking.
- Encourage ability to confidently voice opinions and participate in substantive discussions based on demonstrably informed perspectives about culture, tradition and the discourse of race in America.

Course Description:

For a variety of complicated reasons the image of the American Indian is one of the most ubiquitous and patently false constructs of the American imagination. While representations of Indians abound in movies, advertising, sporting events, and literature, very few of us know even the first thing of actual indigenous culture and history. Many of us are inclined to think of *Indians* as something belonging to the past and have very little concept of what constitutes Native identity in our present day milieu. This class will offer an investigation of Native American literatures

from pre-contact times to the present. We will look at how Native American writings of both yesterday and today have attempted to shore up a sense of cultural identity and tradition through written and orally transmitted stories or narratives. Our approach will be roughly chronological, examining many of the more well known touchstones of Native/colonial relations such as first contacts, Christian missionary movements, forced removals, western plains wars, and the Indian Boarding School programs of the late nineteenth century. But our emphasis will be on how Native communities have sought to define these iconic experiences in their own words and narrative forms, and how they continue to try to wrest representational control of the Native figure from the enduring narrative tropes of the colonizer. Therefore, one of our objectives will be to consider the role that mainstream literature and media play in our understanding of Native identity. How are we continuously influenced by productions like Disney's *Pocahontas*, the novels of writers like James Fenimore Cooper or Zane Grey, Kevin Costner's Academy Award winning movie *Dances with Wolves* or the more recent 3D blockbuster *Avatar*? What is the history behind the narrative tropes that inform these representations and how and why have Native artists sought to reframe them as stories of *survivance* rather than narratives of victimization and vanishing?

Ultimately this class will try to approach an understanding of what exactly it means to be "Native" American in the 21st century. In confronting such an issue one necessarily bumps up against competing claims and complex historical dynamics. It will be our job to try to appreciate these concerns (however much they may challenge the narrative framework upon which we define ourselves as "American"), and to apprehend the important role that language, narrative, and, generally speaking, *literature* play in propagating and contesting Native American identity. My hope is that we will come to a fuller awareness of how Native storytellers today are still very much invested in their communities, their traditional cultures, and the narratives that carry these values along from one generation to the next.

Assignments:

Reading – Even though Native societies are often thought of as primarily *oral* cultures, there is a perhaps surprising amount of *written* literature in existence produced by Native Americans going at least as far back as the 16th century. We will study both written and oral traditions from creation stories, to the Indian Boarding School era of the nineteenth century, and continuing on through what has been heralded as the "Native Literary Renaissance" in the last quarter of the 20th century, as well as on up through our own times. We will try to get a sense of the overall tradition that coheres around this large body of literature, while keeping in mind that there are over 500 federally recognized tribes in the US, and others unrecognized, many with their own distinct language, culture and traditions to be reckoned with, making it impossible to, in any way, offer a comprehensive engagement with the Native literatures of America. As nearly every class session will have a reading assignment, I advise you to take notes, write in the margins of your books, highlight important passages—in other words, do all those things necessary to help you to recall what you've read so that you may speak intelligently about the readings and contribute to the oral culture that constitutes this classroom. As this is an upper level literature class, it is expected that you will read not simply for pleasure, but with a comprehension of the formal elements of literary analysis. We will be concerning ourselves as much with the cultural and historical implications of narrative content and structure as with elements of plot and style. But we should also take time to enjoy the readings in this class while partaking in all these other necessary activities.

Writing – There will be five paper assignments throughout the course of the semester. Papers will begin as short response papers and work their way up to the larger research paper of 8-10

pages that will be required in tandem with an oral presentation that you will give near the end of the semester. Papers should be double-spaced, 12 pt. font (Times New Roman is a good standard). Although I do require that your papers be turned in as hard copies, we can do the environment a favor by making the best use of the 8 1/2 x 11 space afforded by your average sheet of paper (in other words, don't start halfway down the page, or leave large spaces between paragraphs—feel free to use both sides of the page). This will allow you room to more intricately develop your thoughts and give them their full due. You are expected to hand in your work on time. Failure to do so will result in a grade reduction.

Participation:

I purposefully did not design this class as a series of lectures or readings containing information that you must internalize and master. Rather it is organized around the chance that we will have a series of open-ended conversations in which we process the materials we encounter together, while achieving an increasing level of awareness and rhetorical skill as the semester progresses. Be aware, however, that your comments should be related to materials that we cover in class. You should be able to back up your insights with textual evidence if called upon to do so. In other words, this should be a free exchange of informed ideas and opinions on the readings. I will come into class with strong ideas and opinions of my own. Often we will disagree. I expect this and hope to be challenged, enlightened, and entertained by the views you bring to the table. The quality of your overall participation will be reflected in your final grade.

Attendance:

The rule of thumb is, **anything more than two absences will be sure to affect your grade.** It is not adequate to simply do the readings and hand in papers on time. The real learning in this semester (for both you and I) will occur in the discussions taking place in the classroom. There is no substitute for this experience. As you are expected to show up to class on time, three lates will count as a missed class. If for some reason you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to contact me about missed assignments or any materials handed out in class during your absence.

Grading:

The four short response papers, considered as a whole, will account for 40% of your grade. The oral presentation, along with its written component, will account for another 40%. A final 20% will depend upon your contribution to class discussions, your attendance, how well you project a comprehension of the materials worked on in class, small in-class writing assignments, and the general spirit of your participation. Keep in mind that according to SHSU grading procedures:

A= Excellent Work. This is work that stands out above the rest, consistently fulfilling all the required criteria for a given assignment in a cogent, original manner, and with a strong command of the mechanics of style and grammar.

B= Superior Work. Demonstrates a strong grasp of the materials covered in class and an ability to articulate ideas effectively and efficiently. Academic achievement of high quality.

C= Satisfactory Work. Not bad, meets requirements, but perhaps lacking in original interpretation of materials or stylistic fluidity.

D= Unsatisfactory. Does not meet the most basic demands required of the assignment.

F= Failure. Naturally any attempt at plagiarism will result in immediate failure of the course.

This syllabus should be considered your contract for the course. If you have any questions about course materials, expectations or grading procedures, please refer back to this document or schedule an appointment to see me.

Schedule

Jan.	14	Introductions: “Honored Benefactors”
	19	Wendy Rose, “Storyteller” (handout)
	21	Arthur C. Parker, “How the World Was Made” and “Origin of the Longhouse” (handout)
	26	Samson Occum, “Montauk Petition” (handout) Hendrick Aupaumut, “A Short Narration of My Last Journey to the Western Country” (handout)
	28	Images of Manifest Manners William Apess, “A Son of the Forest” (1-56)
Feb.	2	Paper Due (2 pages) William Apess, “An Indian’s Mirror for the White Man” (99-105)
	4	Documents from The Cherokee Removal (handout)
	9	Marilou Akwiata, from <i>Selu</i> (handout)
	11	Thomas King, <i>The Truth About Stories</i> (1-60)
	16	Thomas King, <i>The Truth About Stories</i> (61-119)
	18	Thomas King, <i>The Truth About Stories</i> (121-167)
	23	Paper Due (2 pages) <i>Mad Dog Cafe</i>
	25	A Sheath of Native Poetry
Mar.	2	Sherman Alexie, <i>The Toughest Indian in the World</i> (1-75)
	4	Sherman Alexie, <i>The Toughest Indian in the World</i> (76-149)
	9	Sherman Alexie, <i>The Toughest Indian in the World</i> (150-238)
	11	Paper Due (2 pages) Gerald Vizenor, <i>Ishi in Two Worlds</i> (handout)
	15-19	Spring Break
	23	Dee Brown, from <i>Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee</i> (handout) Charles Eastman, “The Ghost Dance War” (handout)

	25	Lakota Winter Counts N. Scott Momaday, “Wounded Knee Creek” (handout) Wendy Rose, “I Expected My Skin and My Blood to Ripen” (handout)
	30	Traveling Indian Boarding School and Medicine Slide Show Zitkala-Sa, <i>American Indian Stories</i> (on-line resource)
April	1	Zitkala-Sa, <i>American Indian Stories</i> (on-line resource)
	6	Susan Power, <i>Grass Dancer</i> (3-96)
	8	Susan Power, <i>Grass Dancer</i> (99-187)
	13	Susan Power, <i>Grass Dancer</i> (191-333)
	15	Paper Due (2 pages) <i>Incident at Oglalla</i> (out of class screening)
	20	Leonard Peltier, <i>Prison Writings</i> (3-135)
	22	Leonard Peltier, <i>Prison Writings</i> (139-221)
	27	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Ceremony</i> (1-97)
	29	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Ceremony</i> (97-167)
May	4	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Ceremony</i> (167-finish)
	6	Final Class – Paper Due (8-10 pages) Joy Harjo, “She Had Some Horses”