**Children of Immigrants in Contemporary American Fiction**

Spring 2018 // Thursdays: 11am-1:30pm // FYSEM-UA 609

Professor: Jackie Reitzes // Email: reitzes@nyu.edu

Office: 411 Lafayette, #434

“I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn’t want to belong.”

—Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*

**Description:**

In this course, we will read, discuss, reflect, and write about contemporary fictional narratives of first-generation Americans—children coming of age in the U.S. to parents from somewhere else. These characters straddle a cultural divide between the homeland of their ancestors and the country of their youth. Imbued with the older generations’ hopes for a better life, they must also negotiate existing social and economic orders and, frequently, an anti-outsider climate that threatens to unravel the very fabric of the American Dream. We will write through multiple forms—creative, researched, expository argument, and personal response. Through the novels, stories, and film adaptations, we’ll examine questions of language and identity—how the protagonists of these stories forge their own sense of self through the families, cultures, experiences and desires that shape them.

**Required Texts:**


*Junot Diaz, *Drown*, Riverhead Books


*Haley Tanner, *Vaclav & Lena*, Dial Press Trade Paperback

* Writing notebook—you won’t hand this in, but it will be the archive of your annotated thoughts, musings, and questions for this course. As the centralized, continuous record of your questions, ideas, and feelings, it should carry the provisional work you’re doing, from notes on my lessons and collaborative work in class, to home and back again, as you read, work on exercises, brainstorm, and free-write. Think of this as the drawing board, your raw material, where the sketches are drafted before the artwork is made.
Feel free to use it, too, as a kind of journal, for when ideas strike you—on the subway, in the park, whenever.

A note about my class: To me, a good college seminar carries the rigor of a respectful, intellectual debate and the informality of a coffee-shop conversation. Notably, it’s smaller than a lecture class, and so we notice if you’re not here, or if you’re late, or if you’re not awake or unprepared, and the energy of the whole room flags as a result. In a dynamic seminar, participants engage with the texts, with each other, and with me to create a special chemistry. In a dynamic class, students’ questions and observations drive discussion, reflection, and play, which create new questions and observations. A dynamic class evolves into something I can’t predict; it emotes an ineffable quality that is both playful and stimulating, and it’s a compilation of every participant, your attitudes, experiences and contributions. Specifically, and partially due to my (admittedly unconventional) education, my classroom is less formal in tone than others’—I am laid-back in certain ways (first-name basis, accessible via email, etc.), but I expect full effort and courtesy on everyone’s part, so as to create the best possible learning environment. The style of my class is relaxed, but the substance is weighty, and the work expectations are high. These threads are complementary to me, but if they’re contradictory to you, it might take a little getting used to.

Policies:

Quizzes: Brief weekly 4-5 question short answer quizzes to make sure everyone is caught up on reading.

Blog response posts: responses, both personal and literary, to selected passages from the weekly readings. 1-3 well thought-out paragraphs.

Blog guidelines: Each week, read through the posts or threads that classmates have written. Then, in response to the upcoming reading assignment, write a rich paragraph or two, either as a new thread of your own, or in response to someone else’s thread.

Please refer to specific reading passages in addition to general impressions, but quote briefly. Mostly I’m interested in your responses—how passages from the reading make you feel, what course themes they bring up for you, and what genuine questions (not questions just to sound smart), either about the story or about immigrant life in America as seen through the story, they evoke in you.

These blog posts can be observations or questions about the formal aspects of story (point of view, character arc, imagery) or more conceptual or thematic discussions of the content. Remember you’re writing for an audience, so you don’t want to get too rambly, and you want to proof-read, but you’re also writing reflections, so these don’t have to be perfectly composed arguments. Use page numbers and cite parenthetically (MLA style), but you don’t need to use a Works Cited page. When you’re done, check the box for the appropriate week, and add any tags you want (i.e. “gender”; “immigrants”; “coming of age”; “home”; etc.)
*Please aim to have finished the blog and/or comment (and you can of course do both!) no later than Wednesdays at 11am.* Post each week here: www.wp.nyu.edu/childrenofimmigrants

**Close-reading (midterm) paper** (5-6 pages): An interpretive, analytical argument that asks an intellectual question about the reading, close reads selected passages to reveal implicit meaning, and offers an insight or idea about the question posed.

**Final Paper/Project** (8-10 pages): The final for this course may take the form of an academic essay or a creative project. A creative project might be, for example, a short story, a film or video, a staged performance, or a portfolio of visual work. If you choose this option you will be required to produce a script, report, or written reflection on your work. All projects and/or papers will include some element of research.

**Discussion Leaders:** Students will work in pairs to give to lead the class in discussion—introducing the reading for the week, providing key context, asking questions to the group, and prompting a group writing exercise. A sign-up schedule will be distributed during our second class.

**Reading:** This course is reading intensive. You can expect reading assignments to average a little more than 100 pages per week.

**Attendance & Class Participation:** A seminar is a space in which we create meaning collectively. That means that you must attend class ready to listen, think, read, write, re-read, revise, question, and speak thoughtfully. To do all of that, you must complete the reading assignments and writing exercises, and you must complete them with your mind awake. Expect to do some in-class writing every class.

As a general rule of thumb, aim to participate at least twice in every class discussion (and for many of you, it will be much more frequent!). If you’re shy about sharing ideas, you could always volunteer to read aloud, either something I bring in or something you write as part of a class exercise that you have in front of you (or something you bring in!). Note that asking questions is a very useful way to participate, as many others probably share the same question, and inquiry is an essential part of the business of writing.

**Absences:** It is courteous to let me know if you must miss class, and why. It is your responsibility to get caught up on missed work and to complete the homework assignments for the next class. Ask classmates for notes. Documented medical conditions and the observance of religious holidays are legitimate grounds for an excused absence. More than 1 unexcused absence will hurt your participation grade. If you miss more than 3 classes for any reason (excused or not), you will find it difficult to pass the course.

**Late work:** Late work will not be accepted without a serious, documented reason. Grades go down 1/3 of a grade for each day late (B becomes B-, etc.). If you know you
won’t be in class on a day a paper is due, please make arrangements to hand it in ahead of time. I do not accept emailed papers. Extensions will be considered but not guaranteed on a case-by-case basis and with at least 24 hours notice.

Course websites: We will be using the course website at NYU Classes in a number of ways. I will post handouts (like this one) there, so that you have a reference. I will also use NYU Classes to distribute instructions for all assignments. You can find the site through home.nyu.edu (⇒ Academics tab ⇒ NYU Classes). For blog posts, please visit www.wp.nyu.edu/childrenofimmigrants.

Formatting: For citations, you should use MLA (Modern Language Association) Style (see Little, Brown or https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/); MLA is the standard style for work in the field of modern languages and literatures. In addition, please make sure that unless I’ve indicated otherwise, all the written work you turn in to me is:

- typed in 12-point serif font, like Times New Roman;
- double-spaced;
- has margins no larger than 1.0”;
- does not include extra spaces between paragraphs;
- if it is longer than two pages, is page-numbered; and
- if it is longer than two pages, is stapled.

Grading:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Lead</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation*</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly response blogs</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm essay</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper or project</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participation = speaking and active listening in class. Having read and/or completed written assignments before class and being prepared to discuss during class. Timeliness. Offering suggestions or building on other classmates’ comments and written work.

Respectful dialogue: 

The class discussions we have about readings and current events will sometimes consist of culturally charged topics of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Let us strive to always

---

1 from Victoria Anderson
be respectful of others with the language and tone of our comments, and speak up if we feel uncomfortable. Let us also strive to be patient with each other as we explore new territory, as we all have different cultural competency. I am here to help you develop the language and to articulate your ideas on the page and in class, but I am also not perfect. If you need to speak to me after class or email me about something that was confusing or hurtful to you or others, please do. You will not be penalized in any way for calling attention to a problem regarding respectful dialogue in the class.

Support:

The Writing Center provides additional support for student writers at NYU. Writing Center consultants are EWP faculty; they can provide an outside perspective on a draft, be a sounding board as you develop ideas, or help you better understand where you want to take an essay. You can book appointments in advance through the online scheduler, or walk in.

College life can be stressful and overwhelming. I encourage you to reach out if you need help. The NYU Wellness Exchange offers free, confidential counseling services. You can reach them 24/7 at the hotline 212 443 9999 or during walk in hours at 726 Broadway, 344. Find out more at http://www.nyu.edu/students/health-and-wellness/counseling-services.html

Academic Integrity:

Please review the links below for what constitutes plagiarism. Part of your work in this class requires you to use other people’s words and ideas. You must cite which words/ideas are yours, and which are others’ using quotation marks and correct attribution. Failure to do so is a crime and will result in you failing an assignment and possibly the entire course. Plagiarism is presenting as your own:

- a phrase, sentence, or passage of another writer’s work without using quotation marks
- a paraphrased passage from another writer’s work
- facts, ideas, or written text gathered or downloaded from the internet without attribution
- another student’s work with your name on it
- a purchased paper or “research” from a term paper mill

http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity

http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page342054
Provisional Schedule

Week 1: January 25 Introduction to Assimilation~
   Introductions + Master of None + “The Nature of Assimilation”

Week 2: February 1 ~Chicana Belonging & Coming of Age~
   Have read: The House on Mango Street (110 pages) + “The Nature of Assimilation” (finish what we started in class)

Week 3: February 8~ Indian American Naming + Cultural Rituals (pt. 1) ~
   Have read: The Namesake (pp 1-124)
   Discussion Leaders 1 & 2
   Write: Midterm paper proposal

Week 4: February 15~ Indian American Naming + Cultural Rituals (pt. 2)~
   Have read: The Namesake (pp 125-291) + “From Hybrids to Tourists”
   Discussion Leaders 3 & 4
   Write: midterm paper (5-6 pages)

Week 5: February 22 ~Machismo + Intersectionality (pt. 1)~
   Discussion Leaders 5 & 6
   Have read: Drown (pages 1-107)
   Due: Midterm paper (5-6 pages)

Week 6: March 1~Machismo+ Intersectionality~ (pt. 2)~
   Have read: Drown (pages 108-208) + scholarly article TBD
   Discussion leaders 7 & 8

Week 7: March 8~Young love in Brighton Beach~ (pt. 1)
   Have read: Vaclav & Lena (1-152)
   Discussion Leaders 9 & 10

Week 8: March 15~ Spring Break// No Class

Week 9: March 22~Young love in Brighton Beach~ (pt. 2)
   Have read: Vaclav & Lena (152-288)
   Discussion Leaders 11 & 12
Week 10: March 29~History of NYC tenements
    Have read: *The Joy Luck Club* (1-148)
    Class trip to Tenement Museum

Week 11: April 5~The Joy Luck Club + Friendship & Families~
    Have read: *The Joy Luck Club* (149-288)
    Discussion leaders 13 & 14

Week 12: April 12~Middlesex + Intersexuality (pt. 1)~
    Discussion Leaders 15, 16, & 17
    Have read: *Middlesex* (1-148)
    Write: Final essay/project proposal

Week 13: April 19~Research day
    In-class: Bobst library visit
    Have read: *Middlesex* (149-270)
    Due electronically: Final essay/project proposal
    Write: research prospectus + rough draft

Week 14: April 26 Middlesex + Intersexuality (pt. 2)~
    Have read: *Middlesex* (271-397)
    Due electronically: research prospectus
    Due printed: rough draft for peer review

Week 15: May 3~Middlesex + Intersexuality (pt. 3)~
    Have read: *Middlesex* (401-529)
    Due: *Final essay/project portfolio (essay + draft + proposal) due in-class* (8-10 pages)