

Constructions of Self

Objectives:

How is identity formed? What tools do we use to construct our understanding of the world and our understanding of who we are? How can we get closer to objective understanding?

Stories help to define and shape our way of life, our perception, and our understanding of “truth.” Using literature and film as our means, we will examine the ways in which we and/or the characters we read about construct knowledge. The course is designed to allow you to examine yourself and your world more critically through the process of reading, responding to, and writing your own literature. We will compare/contrast the traditional, modern, and post-modern perspectives through reading literature and some developmental psychology. We will then use the information we gather as a tool with which to examine our own membership in contemporary society and the perspective we have because of the way we form our understanding. A recurrent theme will be the tension between being an individual and being a member of a community and how those positions affect a person’s ability to understand objective truth.

Materials and Outline:

First Quarter:

Robert Kegan – Constructive Developmental Psychology

Jacques Lacan – “The Mirror Stage”

Dubois – Double Consciousness

Excerpts from Seamus Heaney’s translation of *Beowulf*

John Gardner’s *Grendel*

I Heart Huckabees (David O. Russell)

Giving Voice – Creative Writing Project

Anthony Burgess’ *A Clockwork Orange*

Paper exploring morals: community vs. individual perspective

Second Quarter:

Anna Deveare-Smith’s play *Fires in the Mirror*

Project: Mapping out a post-modern approach to understanding

Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*

Analysis Paper

Long Reflective Final paper: Examine your own influences and filters. How do they affect your understanding of yourself and the world? How can you move beyond the limitations of your influences and filters?

Grading

Physical Work:

I will provide feedback on every paper or project. You will be asked to rewrite a paper until it shows mastery of the skills we identify for each project. There will be no letter grades. You will see “Not Done Yet,” “Solid,” or “Exemplary”.

You will keep track of all of your work in a portfolio that you will review and reflect on at each grading period. The emphasis on grading is on effort, progress, honesty, and risk taking. You will track your punctuality, work ethic, skills learned, and overall takeaways on each piece of work on your portfolio sheet. These reflections will help you to decide what grade is an accurate reflection of your work. When you hand in your portfolio, it should include each piece of work, your portfolio note sheet, and a typed reflection.

If your work is handed in on time, you have unlimited rewrites on papers and projects. If your work is not on time, you lose your rewrite privileges.

Participation:

You will grade yourself on participation with input from your peers about your behavior in drafting groups/group work.

Circle the answer that most applies to you:

Level of Eye Contact - Good, pretty good, occasional, non-existent

Active Reading - I did ALL of the reading every night, I did the reading almost every night, I did the reading most nights, I did the reading occasionally, I mostly did not do the reading

Notes - I took notes not just for my own future paper/project but to actively make the class better, I took notes that will help my own paper, I took a few notes that helped me remember some details, I did not take any notes

I had my book and my notes open and ready to refer to in class - every day, most days, some days, never.

Drafting Group Behavior:

I had my full, finished draft on: the day it was due, the day after it was due, I didn't finish the paper until the final draft due date.

I thought about how each member of the group felt about my behavior during the group, and here's what I think they felt/saw:

I did everything I could to make the group go well (socially, to help all of the member improve their papers, to keep the tone positive and constructively critical),

My impact on my group was: positive, neutral, negative

Justice:

I stood up for my classmates when I saw an opportunity to: every time, sometimes, never. I called classmates out when I knew they could do/be better (and I did it with as kind a tone as I could): every time, sometimes, never.

I tried to understand why someone thinks the way they think, I didn't really think about what others were thinking, I judged what others thought by whether or not it corresponded to my own thinking.

A Few Reminders:

1. Each student must be on the lookout for ways to deepen and challenge our experience.
2. Your active participation and initiative are essential and will directly determine the vitality of our time together.
3. This is our class, not mine! Think of discussion questions each day that you read and make sure you mold the class into one you feel comfortable in and excited about.
4. It is crucial that you read carefully, collect thoughtful ideas or questions in the form of written notes, complete all assignments on their due date, and prepare to actively participate in class discussion each day.
5. You will be asked to collect your thoughts from each night's readings. Sometimes this will be in note form, other times you will need to write a more directed written response. This can include a close examination of one idea you have read, or multiple ideas and how they compare/contrast or inform your thinking. It can have a personal or informal tone, but it should be detailed, not general. Be specific about what has caused you to think and why.
6. I have difficulty deciphering some handwriting, so I ask that you submit formal written responses, papers, and projects typed in size 12 font, double-spaced, with a one inch margin. (Let me know if you have limited access to a word processor.)
7. It is really important to me that you come to class on time each day. I explain assignments at the beginning of class, therefore it is important for you to be there to know what the expectations are for that night's homework or the following class session.

Attendance:

Both being in class and being to class on time are incredibly important. In SWS there is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. You are allowed to have three absences before your grade can be lowered. Three tardies count as one absence, so multiple tardies can also lower your grade.