

Western University
First Nations Studies Program and the Department of English and Writing Studies
English/First Nations Studies 3880G, Winter 2015
First Nations Literature

Class Meetings:

Tuesdays from 1:30 – 2:20 p.m. and Thursdays from 1:30 – 3:20 p.m. in UCC 53

Contact Information:

Professor: Pauline Wakeham

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Office Hours: Tuesdays from 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. and 2:30 – 3:30 p.m.

Course Teaching Assistant: Ikshaa Pai

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Course Description: *Welcome to First Nations Literature!* This course will provide students with an opportunity to engage with Indigenous concepts and practices of storytelling and to consider the many shapes that Indigenous storytelling takes, including oral narratives, writings, songs, and visual and performance arts. Studying the work of Indigenous artists from across Canada, we will learn about the diversity of Indigenous communities and cultures as well as the particular lands and socio-historical contexts that inform their work. In so doing, we will consider how Indigenous artistic practices express the complexity and vitality of First Peoples' cultural imaginations and ways of knowing.

Course Objectives:

- To introduce students to and/or enrich their knowledge of First Nations literary and cultural production in Canada.
- To consider how the study of First Nations literary and cultural production is enhanced by an attention to Indigenous ways of knowing and, in particular, Indigenous practices of storytelling and their vital importance to many Indigenous communities.
- To consider the relationship between socio-historical contexts and Indigenous literary and cultural production.
- To assist students in honing their critical thinking and writing skills through in-class application of such skills to readings of literary and cultural texts.
- To foster the development of students' distinctive intellectual voices through the practice of engaged listening and thoughtful class participation as well as through the provision of feedback on written work.

Required Texts:

Eden Robinson, *Monkey Beach*

Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Red: A Haida Manga*

Custom Course Book (Available at the University Bookstore)

Please note that all texts listed on the syllabus with weblinks are not included in the Course Book. These texts may be accessed directly online.

Assignments and Grade Distributions

Assignment	% of Grade	Due Date	Length
Response Paper	20%	February 24 th	3 pages
Final Essay	35%	March 31 st	8 pages
Participation	10%	Ongoing	
Final Exam	35%	T.B.A.	3 hours

Final Grades: English Department policy stipulates that a student must earn a passing grade for both term work and the final exam in order to receive a passing grade in a course. Students who earn a failing grade in either the term or final exam grades (even if the average of these two grades is 50% or higher) will receive a default grade of 48%.

A Note on Class Participation:

- Attendance is required at all lectures. Repeated absences from class may result in a formal request to be debarred from writing the final exam, as set out in the Western Academic Calendar: “Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class . . . will be reported to the Dean (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination.” Debarment from writing the final exam automatically results in failure of the course.
- The course participation mark will be based on students’ attendance and punctuality, thoughtful engagement with course readings, relevant and insightful contributions to class discussion, and respectful engagement with the ideas of other classmates. Adequate preparation for each class involves reading all assigned materials *at least* once and *preferably twice* before class, making notes about these texts (underlining or marking key passages, reflecting on your responses to the texts, etc.), and preparing potential questions or comments to raise in class.
- A key part of being prepared for and ready to participate in class is bringing hard copies of the assigned readings for the week. We will be working with these texts closely in class discussion, so it is vital that you bring them with you.

Response Paper Assignment:

- **This assignment can be submitted to the Professor at any time during the semester, up until February 24th, 2014. After that date, late assignments will be assessed the standard late penalties outlined on this syllabus.**
- In order to provide students with feedback on their written work prior to the formal essay assignment for the course, students are asked to write a 3-page response to a text of their choosing from the course readings.

- This assignment is also designed to provide students with practicing the skills of close reading and critical analysis that are central to the final essay assignment for the course. Students are allowed to build upon their response paper—to revise, hone, and extend it—for their final paper for the course. In other words, this response paper assignment can be a starting point or a first draft for the final essay. That said, if students opt to build upon their response paper work for their final essay assignment, they must substantially work with the feedback they have received on the response paper assignment. Failure to address the feedback offered on the response paper could result in a lower grade on the final essay.

- The response paper may be thought of as laying the ground-work for a longer, more detailed essay on the same topic

- If students wish to pursue a new topic distinct from their response papers for their final essay, that is also acceptable.

- Key components of the assignment:

1.) The response paper should be written in proper paragraph form. An introductory paragraph should identify the text being studied as well as the central topic for the paper. Then, the paper should move to a few “body paragraphs” that engage in close readings of at least one substantial passage from the text. The final paragraph of the response paper should be a brief conclusion that addresses why the chosen topic for the paper is important to the literary text being studied. The conclusion can also gesture toward further questions about this same topic.

2.) The response paper does not need to have a thesis statement (although that is welcome), but it should have a **clear statement identifying the one key topic or theme about a text** that will be discussed in detail in the paper.

2.) The response paper **must also devote at least one full page to performing a close reading of a selected passage from the text** that relates to the key topic for the response paper. The passage should be photocopied, highlighted, and appended to the end of the assignment for grading clarity. As a result, the passage need not be quoted in full in the body of the response paper.

- Students are welcome to refer to more than one passage from the text, but they should focus on one primary, substantial passage and devote at least one page to discussion of that passage alone.

3.) The close reading should connect the analysis of textual details (word choice, literary devices, narrative framing, etc.) to the overarching topic you have identified as your focus for the paper. Explain what this passage suggests about the topic you are interested in and formulate an interpretation of the passage substantiated by textual evidence.

- Effective close readings should quote from the text to identify particular words or phrases that are significant and explain why. Close readings can also identify literary devices (i.e. metaphor, onomatopoeia, anaphora, etc.) and consider how these devices help shape the meaning of the passage.

Essay Assignment:

- This assignment must be an argumentative and analytic scholarly essay that demonstrates strong critical thinking skills, the development of an original argument, and the careful utilization of textual details or “evidence” to support the contentions made in the thesis statement. Essays should include a clear and focused thesis statement followed by the coherent and sustained development of the argument throughout the paper.

- Students are not required to consult secondary sources for this paper but they are welcome to do so should they want to. If secondary sources are consulted, however, they must be acknowledged and cited properly and a Works Cited must accompany the essay. For further details regarding formatting and correct citation, please refer to the instructions listed in the following section of this syllabus.

- **Please Note:** The Professor will consider proposals for alternative forms of written final assignments. In order to pursue this option, the student must provide the Professor with a 300-word written proposal regarding the alternative assignment, describing what the assignment would entail, what its topic would be, and what the rationale for pursuing such an assignment would be. Proposals for alternative assignments must be submitted in hard copy at any point during the semester up until the beginning of class on March 3rd, 2014. After that time, proposals for alternative assignments will no longer be considered. The Professor reserves the right to not grant permission for an alternative assignment if the proposal is deemed unsuitable.

Important Information Regarding Assignments:

- All assignments are due at the **beginning of class** on the scheduled due date. Assignments handed in after the commencement of class on the scheduled due date will be assessed a late penalty of 1%. Any assignments submitted after the due date will be assessed a late penalty (2% per day, including weekends). Assignments must be submitted **either directly to the Professor** at the beginning of class or submitted as late and handed in to the secure essay drop-off box outside the English Department office (Arts and Humanities Building Room 2G02).

- Extensions will only be granted with medical certification or under other extenuating circumstances and should, when possible, be arranged with the Professor in advance. For further information, please see the section on “Academic Accommodation” in this syllabus.

- All assignments should be submitted on 8.5 x 11” paper, with 1” margins, double spaced, and in Times New Roman 12-point font. **Please do not use extra spaces between each paragraph.** Please staple your essay pages together rather than using binders or plastic report covers. Essays must be submitted in paper copy. Email, computer disks, and faxes will not be accepted.

- All bibliographic notations should follow the MLA method of parenthetical citation. All assignments that use secondary sources should be accompanied with a “Works Cited” page. For information regarding correct MLA formatting, please consult the Power Point Presentation placed on the course WebCT site. As well, students may consult *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, which is available in the reference section of the DB Weldon Library.

- Please retain one hard copy and one electronic version of every assignment you submit. As well, please retain all marked assignments until you receive your final grade for the course.

Final Examination:

- The final exam will feature two types of questions:

1.) Identifying Quotations: Students will be asked to identify short quotations excerpted from texts studied throughout the term. In proper paragraph form, students should provide the title of the text as well as the full name of the author. Following that, the written response should explain the significance of the particular quotation to the key themes, concepts, and/or arguments developed in the text. Marks will be assigned for the clarity, detail, and insight of the response, as well as attention to spelling and grammar.

2.) Formal Essay Responses: Essays must have a clear thesis statement and structure consisting of an introduction, multiple body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Marks will be

awarded for the strength and originality of the argument; for the ability to mobilize textual evidence to support the argument; and for clarity, coherence, style, and grammar.

Academic Offences:

- It is crucial that students create all assignments (both written and oral) using their own ideas and their own words. If you use a concept, idea, or phrasing from another source, it is imperative to signal the direct borrowing of words with quotation marks and to register the borrowing of ideas and concepts via the use of explanatory footnotes and parenthetical citations. When in doubt, please cite your source rather than leaving it out! Please also note that the same standards of proper crediting of sources apply to oral presentations. Plagiarism is a serious academic offence.

- Students are directed to read the University's policies on scholastic offences at:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

- All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Additional Information for Students:

- For English Department regulations regarding term work, exams, faculty office hours, academic relief (appeals, petitions, complaints), and other matters, please refer to the "Information for Students" on the departmental website at

<http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergrad/info.html>.

- Please note, unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Academic Accommodation:

- Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

- Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested.

- The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at:

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medicalform.pdf>.

- The full Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness is outlined at:

<https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>

- Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Class Schedule

Please Note: The Professor reserves the right to make minor changes to the reading list during the semester. Any changes will be announced in class in advance of the date.

January 6: Welcome and Introduction

January 8: Class Cancelled (Professor at the Modern Languages Association Conference)

January 13: Indigenous Cultures of Storytelling

Brian Maracle, "The First Words"

January 15: Indigenous Cultures of Storytelling (continued)

Thomas King, "'You'll Never Believe What Happened' is Always a Great Way to Start" (from *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*)

Note: You can also listen to an audio recording of King telling this story on the CBC's website (select "Part 1": <http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/massey-archives/2003/11/07/massey-lectures-2003-the-truth-about-stories-a-native-narrative/>)

January 20: In What Languages Can Stories be Told?

Neal McLeod, "Cree Poetic Discourse"

Marilyn Dumont, "The Devil's Language" and "Acimowina"

January 22: In What Languages Can Stories be Told? (continued)

Maria Campbell, "Jacob"

Gregory Scofield, "Prayer Song for the Returning of Names and Sons"

January 27: What Shapes Can Stories Take?

Mils and Eekwol, "The Gauntlet": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uv1C8FMaLPc>

Lindsay "Eekwol" Knight, "Revitalizing Indigenous Swagger: Poetics from a Plains Cree Perspective"

Please also view the Beat Nation website: <http://www.beatnation.org/>

January 29: Narrating Kinship and Community

Eden Robinson, *Monkey Beach*

February 3: Storytelling and Memory

Eden Robinson, *Monkey Beach*

Eden Robinson, Chapter Two from *The Sasquatch At Home: Traditional Protocols and Modern Storytelling*

February 5: Storytelling and Memory (continued)

Eden Robinson, *Monkey Beach*

February 10: Re-Writing Gender

From *The Indian Act*

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, "(a found poem)"

February 12: Remembering the Disappeared

Rebecca Belmore, "Vigil" (this performance art piece can be viewed online at:

<http://www.rebeccabelmore.com/video/Vigil.html>)

The Redress Project (this art installation can be viewed online at:

<http://www.cbc.ca/8thfire/2011/12/reddress-project.html>)

February 17 and 19: Reading Week, No Classes**February 24: Indigeneity and Sexuality**

Gregory Scofield, "You Can Always Count on an Anthropologist (To Set You Straight, Crooked, or Somewhere In-between)"

February 26: Indigeneity and Sexuality (continued)

Beth Brant, "A Simple Act" and "This Place"

March 3: Indigeneity and Sexuality (continued)

Beth Brant, "A Simple Act" and "This Place"

March 5: Class Cancelled (Professor serving on an adjudication committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada)

March 10: Indigenous Graphic Storytelling

Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Red: A Haida Manga*

March 12: Indigenous Graphic Storytelling (continued)

Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, *Red: A Haida Manga*

March 17: The Residential School System in Canada and the Question of Reconciliation

- Visit the website for Truth and Reconciliation Canada at <http://www.trc.ca/>

J.R. Miller, "Residential Schools and Reconciliation" (available at:

<http://activehistory.ca/papers/history-papers-13/>)

Roland Chrisjohn and Tanya Wasacase, "Half-Truths and Whole Lies: Rhetoric in the 'Apology' and The Truth and Reconciliation Commission"

March 19: Residential Schools: Writing as Resurgence

Rita Joe, "I Lost My Talk"

March 24: Residential Schools (continued)**March 26: Final Novel: TBA by Class Vote****March 31: Final Novel: TBA by Class Vote****April 2: Final Novel: TBA by Class Vote****April 7: Class Review and Examination Preparation**