

CROSSING CULTURES*

Required Texts: *The Woman Warrior*, by Maxine Hong Kingston
The coursepack of readings
Handouts (student papers, etc.)
A **good** dictionary, i.e., *Webster's Tenth Collegiate* (hardback preferred)

Recommended Text: *EZ Writer*, by Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors or, online,
The Mayfield Handbook of Technical and Scientific Writing,
by James Paradis, Les Perelman, and Edward Barrett

Focus: MIT students bring rich cultural backgrounds to their college experience. This course explores the splits, costs, confusions, insights, and opportunities of living in two traditions, perhaps without feeling completely at home in either. Course readings include accounts of growing up Asian-American, Hispanic, Native American, and South-East Asian-American, and of mixed race. The texts include selections from Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Kesaya E. Noda's "Growing Up Asian in America," Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek*, Gary Soto's "Like Mexicans," Sherman Alexie's *The Toughest Indian in the World*, Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, the movies *Smoke Signals* and *Mississippi Masala*, Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*, and others. We will also use students' writings as ways to investigate our multiple identities, exploring the constraints and contributions of cultural and ethnic traditions. Students need not carry two passports in order to enroll; an interest in reading and writing about being shaped by multiple influences suffices.

Course Goals: This class will develop your ability to translate your experience and thoughts about it into personal essays by building upon your existing strengths as writers and readers. We will explore what it means to write personally in "The Singular First Person," by Scott Sanders, and "The Essayist and the Essay," by E. B. White, and move on to texts about multiple identities. Through these, we will analyze ways that other writers experience their places in different cultures in order to explore our own. We will contrast the assumptions and expectations of various cultures in the readings and our experience as well as the effects of stereotypes and of having multiple identities. We will consider the ways that either accepting or resisting a culture's patterns can give us power or limit us as well as the ways that crossing cultures can shape our behavior.

* Communication-Intensive course. This course has a limit of 18 students, requires 20-25 pages of revised writing, and includes oral presentation and class participation.

The first goal of the course is to extend your ability to write clear and coherent prose by providing practice in each step of the writing process, giving you new strategies to try, and developing your skills as readers of your own and others' work. The second goal, and a theme of the class, is to develop your sense of yourself *as a writer*. On most weeks, we will spend one day discussing the readings and one day focusing on our own and others' writing: freewriting, good essays and revisions, and responses to peers' work. The last assignment will be to write a retrospective piece about your essays as a collection (or the bones of one).

Logistics. This course gives you practice writing. You can expect to write at least one essay or revision each week. You will practice thinking and expressing yourself by working on a sequence of assignments. My role is to try to draw out your ideas by leading class and discussion, monitoring your progress, commenting to guide you in useful directions, holding scheduled and drop-in conferences, and looking at your gathered work at various points in the semester. My metaphors for this role fluctuate: gardener, mid-wife, coach, pearl-cultivator, phlebotomist. . . . Your role is to listen, read, think, speak, write, and revise as well as you can. (Send out shoots, blossom; deliver healthy offspring; perform your personal best; coat grit with nacre; find a good vein.) Please ask questions—if you wonder about something, others probably do, too.

Writing well requires focus. Certain states of mind are more conducive to good writing than others: “flow,” the calm after exercise or meditation, and certain times of the day and week, depending on your own rhythms (just don't wait for the Muse to wrestle you to your chair—insert yourself in it!) Writers need to work with concentration for long periods of time. Set your own goals and pace for this; I suggest *at least 4-6 good hours* a week for writing, in two uninterrupted sessions. You need a regular time and place to write when you are free from distractions; try (calming) music. This comes in addition to the pre-writing activities--reading, brain-storming, incubating, and whatever else works for you. Talking over ideas can help hugely; try reading out loud.

The essential process of writing is revision, not putting first thoughts in first drafts. Writers improve by returning to their work to see what it does and doesn't do, thinking about what is best in it and in them, and imagining where the best thoughts might lead. Revision requires stepping outside writing, re-seeing it, and changing it; revising may take as much time and thought as a finished draft, if not more. Through reading others' essays, reading your own critically, and paying attention to comments, you will learn to revise more successfully.

Schedules and routines. Please read each selection carefully before we discuss it in class. To practice with summarizing and analyzing, you will hand in Reading (Viewing) Notes for each essay, story, selection, or film we read or see. (See handout.) You might skim to get the gist; please read *carefully* at least once with a pen or pencil in hand to mark sections that seem crucial, difficult, or puzzling to you. (If you cannot commit to pencil markings, use Post-Its or index cards.) Recording your responses will help when you write your Notes, present in class, and participate in discussion.

Copies. Each week, you will write an essay or revision, both as stages in a larger project: a portfolio. Please make three copies of everything you write, one for me and two for peers. Keep my marked copy of everything you write in a sturdy folder as your portfolio-in-progress. In order to evaluate your progress. I will review your portfolio three times: around the fifth, tenth, and last weeks of the term. Final grades will reflect progress in writing as well as class participation. Evidence of engagement with the course, the assignments, and the process of revision will count, as will successful writing.

Pace: I will read and comment upon your essays each week. Each assignment must be completed on time. Each week's work leads to the next, so you cannot afford to fall behind. The first drafts that you submit will receive a , +, or - (a 0 if not submitted). Revisions will receive grades unless we vote otherwise. If you do not hand in a draft, you deprive yourself of feedback from the class and me on your ideas. You may not "skip" one version, handing in only a draft; the process of writing includes revision. You will receive a mark, not a grade, on the first essay you hand in. So write drafts!

Please read my comments from the beginning, along with what you have written. If you do not understand something, ask me. A revision that heads in a completely different direction from what I suggest, or that fails to incorporate my proofreading marks, suffers. My final comments remark on the major strengths and weaknesses of the essay. Read marginal comments to see their contributions to the final one. If you disagree with my remarks, please discuss them with me promptly. Ditto for grades.

Attendance and participation. I will copy at least part of a paper by each of you for a large group workshop, and we will spend lots of time discussing your essays. Participating develops critical reading and revising skills. Active discussion and in-class writing require your punctual presence, so come to class even if you are sleep-deprived or have not completed something. Alert me to your state; I will not expect as much from you, but I expect you to attend unless you are certifiably sick. (Please tell me before class.)

Absences. If you are absent, you are not practicing. More than two absences may lower your grade; over five absences will result in withdrawal or an F for the course. Arriving late will count towards absences. You are responsible for whatever is due next.

Lateness. Three late arrivals equal one absence. Because of the pace of the class, late assignments lose 1/3 of a grade per day late. Not bringing copies for a workshop deprives you of peer responses, which may be brilliant.

Writing groups. Few writers work alone; we rely on colleagues to listen to ideas, read drafts, and help with revision and editing. You will divide into (changing) groups of about three. You will comment on one or more essays each week. We will devise a form or criteria for you to use as you comment; put your name on comments before handing comments to the author and then to me. Comments receive a , +, or -.

Oral Presentations. Each of you will present your Reading Notes or work-in-progress to the class in a rehearsed, audience-(vs. speaker-) oriented presentation. These chats will be brief, about 5 minutes, and geared to spark discussion of the essay. (See Schedule.)

Conferences.

One conference is required, but I'd like to see you at least twice: once to discuss conditions for your best writing and next to plan your portfolio.

Grades: Essays=75%, peer responses & class participation 15%, in-class writing 10%. (N.B.: class participation counts 25% of your grade.) "C" papers fulfill the assignment without frequent or major mechanical errors (grammar, spelling, or punctuation). "B" papers fulfill the assignment with clear ideas, specific support, good organization, and few mechanical problems. "A" papers exhibit original thought, superior development and form suited to the subject and rare errors of grammar, spelling, or punctuation. More specifics will follow separately.

Academic Honesty.

MIT's academic honesty policy can be found at the following link:

<http://web.mit.edu/policies/10.0.html>

Please use MLA style in this course for references to the readings

(i.e., Sanders 14). I expect that all essays will be written *first* and *only* for this class.

Writing Center: The Writing and Communication Center offers free consultations on appointments and sometimes the Center takes walk -ins.

Important Note: Receiving a "B-" or better in 21W.731 means that you automatically pass Phase 1 of the Writing Requirement. If you receive a "C," the instructor will decide, on a case-by-case basis, whether or not you have passed Phase I. Receiving a "D" or "F" means you have not passed Phase I.