

Celebrating Cultural Diversity in Higher  
Education

# **Infusing Multicultural Perspectives Across the Curriculum**

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**Prism Publishing of**

Mount St. Mary's College, Los Angeles, California

1993

# New Women's Voices in American Literature

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## Course Description

In *Writing a Woman's Life*, Carolyn Heilbrun observes, "Women have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots, or examples by which they might assume power over—take control of—their own lives. . . . The stories we have read or heard . . . have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives" (17, 37). Our primary goal in this course is, therefore, to read some of the newest and most prominent novels and stories written by American women in the last 20 years.

## Course Objective

1. To examine narratives written by American women in the last 20 years in the context of our own personal stories and of current feminist critical theory.
2. To see the emergence of new women's voices from the working class and from ethnic groups long sidelined in American literature, assessing their impact on American literature and on the world order.
3. To consider the authors' lives and our own lives as narratives we write each day.

## Assignments

1. Active class participation based on thoughtful reading of assigned texts:  
Cofer, Judith Ortiz. *The Line of the Sun*.  
Erdrich, Louise. *Love Medicine*.  
Heilbrun, Carolyn G. *Writing a Woman's Life*.  
Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior*.  
Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*.  
Naylor, Gloria. *The Women of Brewster Place*.  
Paley, Grace. *Later the Same Day*.  
Viramontes, Helena Maria. *The Moths and Other Stories*.

If several students have already read *The Woman Warrior*, they may read either Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey* or *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan and meet several times in a smaller discussion group.

- If several students have already read *Beloved* or *The Women of Brewster Place*, they, too, will choose an alternate book (perhaps another of Morrison's novels, or one by Alice Walker, or *Dessa Rose* by Sherley Anne Williams) and meet several times in a smaller discussion group.
2. Journal of response to reading. See Learning Activities.
  3. One critical essay, between five and eight pages in length, developed from a topic in the reading journal.
  4. Midterm essay.
  5. Final examination essay.

## Evaluation

Journal.....	20%	200 points
Class participation.....	20%	200 points
Critical essay .....	20%	200 points
Midterm examination.....	15%	150 points
Final examination.....	25%	250 points
Total points possible .....	100%	1000 points

## Topics of Study

Topic/Activity	Assignment
Introduction to the course; theoretical questions.....	Read <i>Writing a Woman's Life</i> . as posed in Heilbrun's <i>Writing a Woman's Life</i> .
<i>Writing a Woman's Life</i> .....	Finish <i>Writing a Woman's Life</i> .
Introduce Cofer's <i>The Line of the Sun</i> .....	Read <i>The Line of the Sun</i> .
Discuss Cofer's <i>The Line of the Sun</i> .....	Read <i>The Line of the Sun</i> .
Introduce Erdrich's <i>Love Medicine</i> .....	Read Erdrich's <i>Love Medicine</i> .
Discuss Erdrich's <i>Love Medicine</i> .....	Read Erdrich's <i>Love Medicine</i> .
Introduce Kingston's <i>The Woman Warrior</i> .....	Read Kingston's <i>The Woman Warrior</i> .
Discuss Kingston's <i>The Woman Warrior</i> .....	Read Kingston's <i>The Woman Warrior</i> .
Introduce Morrison's <i>Beloved</i> .....	Read <i>Beloved</i> .
Individual conferences on critical essay.....	Bring outline or first draft of paper to your conference. Journals due.
Discuss Morrison's <i>Beloved</i> .....	Read <i>Beloved</i> .
Introduce Paley's <i>Later the Same Day</i> .....	Read <i>Later the Same Day</i> .
Conclude discussion of Paley's <i>Later the Same Day</i> . ....	Finish reading <i>Later the Same Day</i> .
Introduce Viramontes' stories. ....	Read <i>The Moth and Other Stories</i> .
Discuss Viramontes' stories. ....	Read <i>The Moth and Other Stories</i> .
Final draft of critical essay due.	
Introduce Naylor's <i>The Women of Brewster Place</i> .....	Read <i>The Women of Brewster Place</i> .
Discuss Naylor's <i>The Women of Brewster Place</i> .....	Read <i>The Women of Brewster Place</i> .
Final discussion and review of course. ....	Journals due.
Final examination.	



## Learning Activities

### Writer's Notebook

People who read and who think about what they read often keep a notebook containing favorite quotations or their own reactions to things they read. Some people also keep a journal in which they write down their ideas, describe events in their lives, or reflect on problems or events in the world.

For this class, you are required to keep a notebook or journal responding to the novels and stories we are reading. This notebook will be worth 200 points; it will be checked once during conferences halfway through the term; and it will be turned in at the conclusion of the course.

Each notebook should have about four entries for each book we read, totaling around 32 entries (two per week, three some weeks). Doing this work will give you a chance to reflect on the things we are reading, generate ideas that you might choose to use in your critical essay, and demonstrate that you are doing the reading.

Each entry in your notebook should be about one page long (250 words). You can keep them in a spiral notebook, a loose-leaf binder, or on a computer ("ENTRY1," "ENTRY2," etc.), printing them out when convenient. If you are pursuing an idea and want to write more than one page, that's fine; you may be onto a good paper topic.

Each entry should begin with the date, title of book, and a brief quotation from the book (with page number). Then write an informal response to the passage you are quoting or an analysis of the words, images, and ideas in the quotation.

If you wish, some of your journal entries can be responses to anything else you come across that interests you and relates to the subjects we are discussing in this class. It may be a movie, a newspaper article, a book, an event at work or at home, an event in California, the nation, or the world. If possible, include a specific quote (with page reference) to begin these journal entries.

Your writing can be informal in these entries (no introduction, organized presentation, or conclusion), but please check each entry for complete sentences and correct spelling.

See the following suggestions on how to write a response for your journal.

(I am indebted to Sue Belles and Elizabeth Hoffman of California State University, Long Beach, for working out many of these details on the use of writers' notebooks in literature classes.)

#### Suggestions for Entries

1. Select a key passage from what you have read (anything that strikes you or puzzles you). It may be a single sentence, several sentences or a whole paragraph.
2. Write the date on a blank sheet or a blank page of your notebook. Then carefully copy out or type the passage single-spaced, followed by the name of the author, work, and page number. (If it's too long, copy one sentence and indicate that you are responding to the whole paragraph or page.)
3. In double-spaced handwriting or typing, respond to the passage, usually commenting also on the work as a whole (or what you have read so far).
4. If you don't have an immediate response, answer one of these questions:

What is the author saying in this passage?

Is it relevant to any event in my life or in the world?

Why do I like or dislike this character?

Is this author easy to read and understand or difficult?

Do I agree with the author's idea in this passage?

Do I like this author, this book? Why? Why not?

Do I like this author's style of writing?

What word, object, or detail jumps out at me in this passage? Why is it important?

Does this passage illustrate or challenge any ideas from *Writing a Woman's Life* by Carolyn Heilbrun?

Does this passage relate to any concepts of feminist literary theory discussed in class?

### **Recommended Reading**

Abel, Elizabeth, ed.  
*Writing and Sexual Difference.*

Flynn, Elizabeth A. and Patrocinio P. Schweickart, eds.  
*Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts.*

Gilligan, Carol.  
*In a Different Voice.*

Minh-Ha, Trinh T.  
*Woman, Native, Other.*

Showalter, Elaine, ed.  
*The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory.*