

MAS 144 Chicana/o Literature

SJSU | Spring 2015

MW
1:30-2:45pm

Clark 243

3 units

Image credit:
Balle by Carmen
Lomas Garza (2001)



course overview

Confronting legacies of racism and oppression, Chicana/o literature and poetry is a body of work marked by a concerted effort by Chicana/os to define themselves in new, non-stereotypical ways. This course will introduce you to Chicana/o literature from the 1940s to today. Our goal will be to explore how Chicana/os have used creative writing to reflect upon and written about their position as people of Mexican descent living within the

United States. The primary texts we read share many themes: Shifting allegiances between life in Mexico and life in the US; resistance to changing conceptions of identity; gender and class tensions within Mexican communities; and the political nature not just of work, but also of home life. We will read a number of seminal novels, short stories and poems, and learn what it means to undertake close literary readings of our texts.

instructor info

Dr. Magdalena L. Barrera, Associate Professor, Mexican American Studies

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office hours: Mondays 3:00-5:00pm; Tuesdays 10:00-11:45am; and by appointment

required textbooks

The following textbooks are required and available for purchase from the SJSU Bookstore, as well as through vendors such as Amazon. Please bring physical copies to class so that we can be on the same page (literally!).

1. Norma Cantu, *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (University of New Mexico Press, 1995)
2. Ana Castillo, *So Far From God* (W.W. Norton, 2005)
3. Sandra Cisneros, *House on Mango Street* (Vintage Books, 1989)
4. Arturo Islas, *The Rain God* (Avon Books, 1984)
5. Tomas Rivera, *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* (Arte Público Press, 1995)

All other readings can be found in our course reader (marked “CR” on the syllabus), which is available for purchase from [San Jose Copies](#) (109 E. Santa Clara St; 408-297-6698). **You must purchase a reader for this class and bring it with you to each class session.** Please order and pick it up ASAP, as readings in it are due by the second week of class. San Jose Copies business hours are 9:00am to 6:00pm Monday through Friday, and 10:00am – 5:00pm on Saturdays. The cost of the reader is ~\$10.00.

course promises and expectations

This course will enable you to

- ▶ Understand how Mexican Americans have expressed themselves through creative fiction and poetry;
- ▶ Contextualize the historical and literary trends that influenced these writings;
- ▶ Develop your skills in literary analysis and close-readings; and
- ▶ Use both primary readings as inspiration for making your own contribution to the realm of Chicana/o literature.

This course will fulfill these promises only if you promise the following in return:

To attend class and be an attentive participant.

It is your responsibility to actively engage in our discussions. Please respect the learning experience of others: Laptops, cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned off and stowed away for the duration of our meeting.

Please do your best to arrive on time. Of course, we all experience a day in which we miss the bus, the car won't start, the babysitter is late, etc. On the occasional day that you miss class, you must write a poem about why you were late and read it to us at the next class session. Habitual lateness, however, will have a negative impact on your overall participation grade.

To read the assigned materials. The assigned readings provide us with a common background so that we can proceed together to new understandings. If you do not keep up with and/or do not complete the readings, you will have little chance of doing well in this class.

To complete the required assignments on time.

The writing assignments offer you the opportunity to articulate in your own words your engagement with our materials and themes, not to mention also to strengthen your writing skills. You will gain the most if you submit your work on time. Please note that assignments submitted late will receive only half-credit; those submitted more than one week late will not be accepted at all.

To communicate with me. If you have any questions or concerns about the readings and assignments, please let me know. This is particularly important if you experience a family or medical emergency that interferes with your performance in the course or prevents you from attending class. On a more positive note, if you have suggestions for course-related materials that you would like to share or a topic that you would like to hear more about, I would like to hear that, too.

assignments and grades

You will be graded on the following components:

1. Class Participation (15%)

Although I will occasionally provide a brief lecture in order to share contextual information, this class will rely most heavily on discussion. As such, your educational experience will be a communal one: you will get out of it what you put into it.

2. In-class Writings (15%)

In most class session, we will undertake brief in-class writings that will help you practice your literary analysis skills and deepen your engagement with our readings.

3. Office Hour Meeting (5%)

Due Date: no later than Wednesday, March 18

Meeting one-on-one is an important part of helping you to achieve your best in this course. You should see this as an opportunity to check in on your performance, clear up any questions or concerns you may have about the readings or assignments, share your thoughts on how the class is going, etc.

4. Short Essays (4 at 10% each; 40% overall)

Due Dates: February 25; March 18; April 22; May 11
You will write four short (3 – 4 page) essays that will take many forms, such as a literary close-reading of our texts or even an “autobioethnography” based on a family photo, much like the pieces from *Canícula*. You will receive further and more detailed instructions for each of these writings in class. Please note that all of these are due at the *start of class* on the assigned days.

5. Final Exam (25%)

Date: May 20, 12:15-2:30pm

The final exam will consist of several short answers in which you will identify and briefly analyze the readings, as well as final “what does it all mean” essay. Please mark your calendars now: The final is scheduled for Wednesday, May 20 from 12:15 – 2:30pm. Alternate and/or make-up dates will not be scheduled except in extreme emergencies.

quotes from chicana/o writers

“I always tell people that I became a writer not because I went to school, but because my mother took me to the library. I wanted to become a writer so I could see my name in the card catalogue.”

- Sandra Cisneros

“No Statue of Liberty ever greeted our arrival in this country . . . we did not, in fact, come to the United States at all. The United States came to us.”

- Luis Valdez



grading guidelines

ESSAYS will be graded on their engagement with the materials of the course, and the intellectual curiosity and creativity they exhibit:

A range: This paper is outstanding in form and content. The thesis is clear and insightful; it expands in a new way on ideas presented in the course. The evidence presented in support of the argument is carefully chosen and deftly handled. The argument is not only unified and coherent, but also complex and nuanced. Finally, and most important, the essay shows a real engagement with the materials, and some indication of the wider implications of the thesis.

B range: This paper's thesis is clear; the argument is coherent and presents evidence in support of its points. The argument shows comprehension of the material and manifests critical thinking about the issues raised in the course. The paper is reasonably well written and proofread. The argument, while coherent, does not have the complexity, the insight, or the integrated structure of an A range paper, but still has some of the passion and engagement of an A range paper.

C range: This paper has some but not all of the basic components of an argumentative essay (i.e., thesis, evidence, coherent structure): for example, it may offer a thesis of some kind, but it presents no evidence to support this thesis; or it may present an incoherent thesis; or it may simply repeat points made in class without an overall argument. Such a paper is usually poorly organized, written and proofread. The paper is also seems to lack any real engagement with the subject matter, and shows little understanding of the course materials.

A paper will fall below a "C" if it lacks more than one of the basic components of an argumentative essay.

PARTICIPATION in discussion will be evaluated on the following guidelines, which stress not just quantity but also quality:

A range: The student is fully engaged and highly motivated. This student is well prepared, having read the assigned texts, and has thought carefully about the texts' relation to issues raised over the course of the semester. This student's ideas and questions are productive (either constructive or critical); they stimulate class discussions and take it in new directions. This student listens and responds to the contributions of other students.

B range: The student attends class regularly, is somewhat prepared for discussion, and participates consistently, though not daily. This student contributes to the discussion by sharing thoughts and questions that demonstrate familiarity with the material. This student sometimes refers to the materials discussed in lecture and shows some interest in other students' contributions.

C range: The student meets the basic requirements of section participation: preparedness and regular attendance. This student participates rarely in class discussion. This student may offer a few interesting or insightful ideas from time to time, but these ideas do not connect well to the general discussion: they do not help to build a coherent and productive discussion.

Participation falls below a "C" if it lacks either preparedness or regular attendance.

official policies

Preparing for Class

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of forty-five hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

Academic Integrity

Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University, and the University's Integrity Policy require you to be honest in all your academic coursework. Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you would like to include in your assignment any material you have submitted or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Policy F06-1 requires approval of instructors. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The website for Student Conduct and Ethical Development is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html.

SJSU Writing Center

The Writing Center in Clark Hall 126 offers tutoring services to San Jose State students in all courses. Writing Specialists assist in all areas of the writing process, including grammar, organization, paragraph development, coherence, syntax, and documentation styles. For more information, visit the Writing Center (<http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter>) or call 924-2308.

A Note about Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious offense and will not be tolerated. All references must be cited. Penalties for plagiarism range from an "F" in the course to

expulsion from SJSU. Students suspected of plagiarism will be asked to demonstrate that the work submitted is original and may be reported to the Office of Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action. You can find further information and even take a tutorial about plagiarism at (<http://tutorials.sjlibrary.org/tutorial/plagiarism/index.htm>).

On Recording Lectures and Publicly Sharing Course Materials

Common courtesy and professional behavior dictate that you notify someone when you are recording him or her. You must request via email our permission to make audio or video recordings in this class, no later than one week prior to the date of the lecture you wish to record. Such permission allows the recordings to be used for your private, study purposes only. The recordings are the intellectual property of the instructors; you have not been given any rights to reproduce or distribute the material. Moreover, in this course, the active participation of students or guests will be on the recording, which means that permission of those students or guests should be obtained as well.

Course material developed by the instructors is their intellectual property of the instructor and cannot be shared publicly without his/her approval. You may not publicly share or upload instructor generated material for this course such as exam questions, lecture notes, or homework solutions without instructor consent."

Campus Policy in Compliance with the Americans with Disability Act

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with either one of us as soon as possible, or see us during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the [AEC](#) (Accessible Education Center) to establish a record of their disability.

course schedule

subject to change with fair notice

date		themes, readings, and assignments
Week 1	1/26	Introductions to each other and to the course
	1/28	Histories David Gutierrez, “Legacies of Conquest” (distributed electronically) Americo Paredes, “The Mexico Texan” (distributed electronically)
Week 2	2/2	Ramon Gutierrez, “Unraveling America’s Hispanic Past” (CR 1-23) Mario Suarez, “El Hoyo” (CR 24-25)
	2/4	Language Gloria Anzaldua, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” (CR 26-32) Michele Serros, “Mi Problema” (CR 33-34)
Week 3	2/9	Stephanie Elizondo Griest, “Legacies” (CR 35-39)
	2/11	Who is Chicana/o? Suarez, “Maestría” and “Kid Zopilote” (CR 40-47) El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán (CR 49-50)
Week 4	2/16	Corky Gonzalez, “I Am Joaquin” (CR 51-58) La Chrisx, “La Loca de la Raza Cósmica” (CR 59-61)
	2/18	On the Migrant Trail Tomas Rivera, <i>And the Earth Did Not Devour Him</i> , 83-106
Week 5	2/23	Rivera, <i>Earth</i> , 107-129
	2/25	Rivera, <i>Earth</i> , 130-152 ➤ <i>Short Essay 1 due</i>
Week 6	3/2	Urban Life Sandra Cisneros, <i>House on Mango Street</i> , 3-37
	3/4	Cisneros, <i>House</i> , 38-75
Week 7	3/9	Cisneros, <i>House</i> , 76-110
	3/11	Cisneros, “Woman Hollering Creek” (CR 62-69)
Week 8	3/16	Middle Class Experiences Michele Serros, “Dead Pig’s Revenge,” “Attention Shoppers” and “Senior Picture Day” (CR 70-78)
	3/18	Serros, “Annie Says” and “Good Parking” (CR 79-84) ➤ <i>Office Hour Meeting due</i> ➤ <i>Short Essay 2 due</i>

course schedule (con't)

subject to change with fair notice

date		readings and assignments
Week 9	3/23-25	No classes: Spring Break
Week 10	3/30	Arturo Islas, <i>Rain God</i> , “Judgment Day” and “Chile”
	4/1	Islas, <i>Rain God</i> , “Compadres and Comadres”
Week 11	4/6	Islas, <i>Rain God</i> , “Rain Dancer”
	4/8	Islas, <i>Rain God</i> , “Ants” and “The Rain God”
Week 12	4/13	Material Realism Norma Cantú, <i>Canícula</i> , Intro-32
	4/15	Cantú, <i>Canícula</i> , 33-64
Week 13	4/20	Cantú, <i>Canícula</i> , 64-94
	4/22	Cantú, <i>Canícula</i> , 95-132 ➤ <i>Short Essay 3 due</i>
Week 14	4/27	Magical Realism Ana Castillo, <i>So Far From God</i> , Chapters 1-4
	4/29	Castillo, <i>So Far</i> , Chapters 5-8
Week 15	5/4	Castillo, <i>So Far</i> , Chapters 9-12
	5/6	Castillo, <i>So Far</i> , Chapters 13-16
Week 16	5/11	[cushion day] ➤ <i>Short Essay 4 due</i>
	5/13	Wrap up and preparing for final exam
Finals	5/20	Final Exam 12:15-2:30pm