

VISITING AUTHORS SEMINAR
English 139, Section 1 – Spring 2016

**Until that time I had spent most of my life in classrooms,
and I was planning after that European detour to spend
most of the rest of my life in classrooms.
Not the musty, shadowed, ivy-draped buildings
in which I had spent the previous four years.
This world of wide boulevards and centuries-old buildings
and six-table sawdust restaurants and glasses of
vin ordinaire and fire-eaters on street corners and
poetry readings in cramped second-floor bookshops
and mysterious women who smiled at me so that my heart
leaped and I walked for hours restless under
the plane trees by the Seine.
This was the classroom.
— Don George**

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

In Visiting Authors we will have a wonderful opportunity to interact with successful living writers, both through their presentations at the Center for Literary Arts and meeting them. Students will read the works of these authors, which will provide a basis for our class discussions, presentations, and written assignments. Note that attendance at all CLA events is required, so please plan your schedule accordingly. See www.litart.org for a calendar of events. Prerequisite: Upper division standing.

Copies of this syllabus and schedule may be found on the English Department website.

REQUIRED TEXTS

With the exception of *Reed 150*, all books should be available at Spartan Bookstore.

Just Mercy; Brian Stevenson

My Kind of Place: Travel Stories from a Woman Who's Been Everywhere; Susan Orlean

The Way of Wanderlust: The Best Travel Writing of Don George; Don George

A Thousand Shards of Glass; Michael Katakis

Under The Stars: How America Fell In Love With Camping; Dan White

The Diver's Clothes Lie Empty; Vendela Vida

Reed Magazine 150th Anniversary Edition

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will demonstrate the ability to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works and critical approaches.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

ASSIGNMENTS

Here are the major assignments required for this course:

1. Students will turn in two-page response papers for each reading assignment that demonstrate familiarity with the text. (SLO 1,3,5)
2. Each student will give a 10-15 minute presentation, working in teams to cover the readings. These presentations will include the author's use of literary techniques, background information on the author, particularly his or her professional career; and social and historical factors which influenced the work. (SLO 1,4,5)
3. Our major semester project will be a five- to ten-page critical essay analyzing works from class; in addition you may discuss outside reading related to the class. Students will choose a theme, such as the role of place as a character in fiction, or perhaps the use of travel writing as a work of advocacy, and create an original exploration of how our texts connect to this theme. (SLO 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

**I'm a passionate voyager, and as soon as I can
force the locks shut on my overstuffed suitcase,
I'm eager to head out the door.
I love the jolt you get from travel.
I love the freshness and surprise of being in a new place,
the way it makes even the most ordinary things seem
extraordinary and strange. It make me feel extra-alive.
— Susan Orlean**

**In some ways when I'm writing a book,
the ideas come from the landscape.
It's not some arbitrary plot that was injected onto a place.
For example, in *Let the Northern Lights Erase Your Name*,
everything about it was dictated by the landscape:
the mystery, the stark truths of her past, all that.
It all rises from the landscape. So, for me,
landscape isn't just inspirational, it's essential.
— Vendela Vida**

GRADING POLICY

Final grades will be calculated thus:

20% two-page critiques

20% presentations

20% class participation and event attendance

40% final paper

There are no examinations for this class.

DEPARTMENTAL GRADING POLICY

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the official SJSU [Catalog](#) ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C = average; D = below average; F = failure. Note that plusses or minuses may be added to grades that are in between two letter grades.

CLASS MEETINGS & ATTENDANCE

Although absences are not directly used as a factor for grades, it is impossible to participate in class discussion if you are not present. To this extent, I will take roll each class, and students who come in after roll call will be considered absent. If you are ill, or are presented with an emergency that will cause you to miss more than one class, please contact me as soon as possible. In addition, since the focus of this seminar is to study and interact with visiting authors, it is mandatory to attend all CLA events.

CLASSROOM PROTOCOL

Students are welcome to disagree with one another during class discussions; however, all our dialogue must be conducted with respect for each individual's opinions. In addition, the following practices are forbidden while class is in session: eating and the use of laptops or cell phones.

**It's difficult to do what I'm doing
and be married and have kids.
— Bryan Stevenson**

PAPER FORMAT

All material handed in should follow the same guidelines as those for submitting professional manuscripts:

- typewritten, double-spaced, black ink with copy dark enough to be easily read
- one-inch margins on all sides
- text on one side of the paper only
- 12-point type in a highly-legible font
- indented paragraphs (i.e. the appropriate format for print essays, *not* double spacing between paragraphs)
- your name and the assignment title single-spaced in the upper left-hand corner of the first sheet
- title centered on the first page
- pages numbers included
- pages stapled or paper-clipped together

Points will be subtracted for improper formatting.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

The link below contains university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>.

The real America is a place obsessed with religion but not ethics, the law, not justice. It is neither the democracy nor the capitalist society touted by corporations, politicians and the media, who perform their own kabuki dance of pretend objectivity when in reality they're another cog in the corporate state, dependent on its largess. What is most disturbing, however, is the willful indifference and arrogance that has now made many Americans comfortable with injustice, both at home and abroad.

— Michael Katakis