

LITERATURE AND LABOR

(OR WHAT IT MEANS TO WORK)

FALL 2026

Time: Tu+Th 11:40AM - 1:00PM

Location: Dalton 10

Course Number: EMLY B001-004

Student Hours: Tuesdays -2:00-3:00pm

Office Location (for in-person meetings): English House Office 001

INSTRUCTOR

Professor J. Felix Gallion

jgallion@brynmawr.edu

GOOGLE DRIVE FOR CLASS NOTES

Sign up to be a note taker here. You are required to take notes for at least one class meeting.

OVERVIEW

This course explores the way American literature defines and represents different forms of “work” in relation to different racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities. Within this is an examination of the regimes of racialized labor that have defined specific periods of U.S. history and the social, ideological, and technological forces that have enabled them. An historical anchor for this course is the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which not only marks the annexation of the Southwest from Mexico but also changes in ideas and practices around different forms of labor that define the American economy today. Beginning shortly before 1848 with slave narratives to consider how the economy of slavery was integral to this annexation of territory, we will move through range of literary texts and forms of media to consider questions of labor during Reconstruction, labor at the turn of the 20th century, and finally

contemporary literary representations of labor with an emphasis on the immigration experience and the kinds of labor transnational migrants provide for the nation. In our exploration of literary theory in relation to what it means to work, we will also engage with technical texts in managerial science and the digital humanities to track changes in the corporate and legal discourse around immigration, migrant labor, and categories of difference.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

You will gain the skills necessary for successful participation in seminar-style courses, while also developing close reading, analytic viewing, and analytic writing skills. Our focus will be on modes of critical reading and viewing, broadly applicable to other kinds of texts.

1. Introduce students to critical thinking about literary theory, culture, and mediation through multiple disciplines across the humanities and social sciences.
2. Students will gain analytic reading, writing, viewing skills along with essential humanities research methods through a deep cultural and socio-political analysis of the concept of “work.”

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Isabel Cañas, *Vampires of El Norte*, Berkley Books, 2023.
- Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845)
- Tomás Rivera, *...Y no se lo trago la tierra* (Arte Público Press, 1971)
- Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker* (Riverhead Books, 1996)
- NoViolet Bulawayo, *We Need New Names* (Back Bay Books, 2013)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1:

Unit: The Work of Writing

Sep. 1st

Go over syllabus – How to Take This Course

Sept. 3rd

- Williams, Carlos Williams. "The Destruction of Tenochtitlan: *Cortez and Montezuma*." *In the American Grain*, New Directions Paperback, 1956.
 - Keywords: "Work" and "Writing" from *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Blackwell Publications, 2005.
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Week 2:

Sept. 8th

- Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2011. (excerpts)

Unit: Vaqueros and Vampires

Sept. 10th

- Isabel Cañas, *Vampires of El Norte*, Berkley Books, 2023. (to pg. 100)
 - Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Article 9)
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Week 3:

Sept. 15th

- Isabel Cañas, *Vampires of El Norte*, Berkley Books, 2023. (pg. 101 - 200)

Sept. 17th

- Isabel Cañas. *Vampires of El Norte*, Berkley Books, 2023. (pg. 201 - 300)
 - Martinez, Monica Muñoz. *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas*. Harvard University Press, 2018. (excerpt)
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Week 4:

Sept. 22nd

- Isabel Cañas, *Vampires of El Norte*, Berkley Books, 2023. (pg. 301 - end)

First Assignment Draft Due

Unit: Slavery and Unfree Labor

Sept. 24th

- Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Barns & Classics, 2005. (Chapter I - VI)
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Week 5:

Sept. 29th

- Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Barns & Classics, 2005. (Chapter VII - XII)

Oct. 1st

- Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Barns & Classics, 2005. (Chapter XIII - XVIII)
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Week 6:

Oct. 6th

- Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Barns & Classics, 2005. (Chapter XIX - XXIII).

Unit: How to Revise

Oct. 8th

- Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *"They Say, I Say": The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. Fourth edition., W.W. Norton & Company, 2018.

In class Assignment 1 revisions

Oct. 10th - 18th

- FALL BREAK
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Week 7:

Unit: Field Work

Oct. 20th

- Buckley, Patricia Morris. *To Walk the Sky: How Iroquois Steelworkers Helped Build Towering Cities*. HarperCollins, 2025.

Oct. 22nd

- Rivera, Tomás, and Evangelina Vigil-Piñón. --y no se lo tragó la tierra. 3rd Arte Público Press ed., Arte Público Press, 1995. (first half)
 - Ramón Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1990. (excerpt)
 - Cardenas, Edelweiss. Political Protest Illustration in the Farm Worker Rights Movement. Master of Fine Arts Thesis, FIT 2024. (excerpts)
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Week 8:

Oct. 27th

- Rivera, Tomás, and Evangelina Vigil-Piñón. --y no se lo tragó la tierra. 3rd Arte Público Press ed., Arte Público Press, 1995. (second half)

Oct. 29th

- Gallion, J. Felix. "Ghosts in the Fields: Farmworker Oral History and Carcerality on the Migrant Trail," Labor and Working-Class History Association Annual Conference: Class in Everyday Life, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, May 2023

ASSIGNMENT #2 DRAFT DUE

Week 9:

Unit: The "Work" of Culture

Nov. 3rd

Library Visit

Nov. 5th

- Lee, Chang-rae. *Native Speaker*. Riverhead Books, 1996. (to pg. 100)
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Week 10:

Nov. 10th

- Lee, Chang-rae. *Native Speaker*. Riverhead Books, 1996. (pg. 101 -200)

Nov. 12th

ASSIGNMENT #2 PEER READ AND REVISIONS

Week 11:

The Work" of Culture Cont'd

Nov. 17th

- Lee, Chang-rae. *Native Speaker*. Riverhead Books, 1996. (pg. 201 - 300)

Nov. 19th

- Lee, Chang-rae. *Native Speaker*. Riverhead Books, 1996. (to end)
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Week 12:

Unit: The Work of Making a Home

Nov. 24th

- Bulawayo, NoViolet. *We Need New Names*. Back Bay Books, 2013. (to pg. 80)

Nov. 25th

- THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 13:

The Work of Making a Home Cont'd

Dec. 1st

- Bulawayo, NoViolet. *We Need New Names*. Back Bay Books, 2013. (pg. 81 - 160)

Dec. 3rd

- Bulawayo, NoViolet. *We Need New Names*. Back Bay Books, 2013. (pg. 161 - 240)

ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE

Week 14:

Course Wrap up

Dec. 8th

- Bulawayo, NoViolet. *We Need New Names*. Back Bay Books, 2013. (pg. 241 to end)

Dec. 10th

- *Rising Voices, Season 3* Short Film Collection

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Assignments and Grading Breakdown:

Attendance/Participation: 20%

Reading Journal: 15%

Short Essays and Revisions: 50%

ATTENDANCE / PARTICIPATION:

Given the limited number of meetings for our course, more than 2 unexcused absences will result in the drop of a letter grade. If there are extenuating circumstances that require you to miss more than two classes, please let me know so we can discuss how best to proceed.

READING JOURNALS

Taking a few moments to reflect on what you read before class will help you get more out of the ensuing discussion and will get you in the habit of writing about what you read. If you're stuck on what to write about, start with "The moment that interested me most in today's reading was..." and then explain why you found yourself intrigued. Write about 75 words—that is exactly the length of this paragraph.

Bring your reading journal to class each Tuesday. These should be hand-written. If for any reason you don't want other students to read a particular reading journal, you may email it directly to me.

SHORT ESSAYS

You will write three essays and a final reflection over the course of the semester. Each essay will be 5 pages, and the reflection will be 3-4 pages. For each essay, you will submit a rough draft, discuss that draft in tutorials, make substantial revisions, and turn in a final version. Only the final version will receive a grade, but all these steps must be completed. Full assignment descriptions and instructions will be posted to Moodle.

FINAL REFLECTION ESSAY

This reflective exercise is meant to allow you to write critically, as well as freely and creatively, while engaging in textual analysis. This means that I expect you to use the techniques of close reading to explain your chosen topic, but that you may choose to structure your reflection in another way than as a formal essay with an introductory paragraph ending in a thesis statement.

NOTES ON ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

I do not read rough drafts, but I will conference them and will read an intro or paragraph. I also urge you to make an “argument map” of 5 key points.

I can conference in-person or over Zoom .

Responses should always be motivated by an argument, not guided by personal conviction but by a close reading of the text(s).

Generative AI: As a general rule, generative AI is not allowed on written or critical-creative assignments. There are several reasons for this:

1. The study of literature and culture is about learning how humans create and think about life and the possibilities it affords. It is also about learning how to communicate your own thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Relying on generative AI for communicating denies you an essential skill for human relations.
2. The popularly held belief that AI models “know” enough to generate intelligible writing on all topics is exactly that - a belief not rooted in evidence. The particular knowledge within this course is not well covered in AI learning models. The writing/media generated, then, is not accurate. If you doubt this and still try to turn in AI generated assignments, you will embarrass yourself. The same goes for using AI for research for this course.

*** If you are still interested in using generative AI, we can discuss how to ethically and reliably use it as a tool for academic and critical-creative purposes.

STYLE GUIDE

Unless otherwise indicated, all assignments must be:

Typed, 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double spaced, titled, and with page numbers and citations (MLA format). Please put your name, date, and the class name in an upper corner on the first page. If you foresee a difficulty with a deadline or an emergency arises, please contact me with as much advance notice as possible to arrange for an alternate due date, which may also result in a reduced grade.

CLASS CONTRACT

Reading: It is required that you do the reading and listening for each class meeting. I have chosen readings that are “doable,” but also challenging and rewarding in content. I invite you all to consider how reading for this course will factor into your lives, developing a consistent habit. I’m happy to help you strategize. I will periodically check in to see how reading is going for you. Bring the reading to each meeting session (have a hard copy or have it handy on your computer).

Engagement: is evaluated in terms of presence, comportment, preparedness, and participation.

Participation: Each member is required to participate in discussion, but that doesn’t always mean speaking and in every class. It can mean listening with intention and respect or helping by finding relevant passages that support the discussion. This is why I give an “engagement” grade. I also invite you to email me your continuing thoughts. I will do my best to generate questions that will engage and excite you, and I ask you to do the same. I will also do my best to allow time for thinking. I ask that you listen to your peers and do your best to respond directly to something you have heard or read, also doing your best to make a clear and thoughtful contribution that is also supported by evidence in the text. If you don’t have evidence, or you are not sure where your comment is grounded, say as much, and we as a group can help find it. I will point out when your comment seems too loosely speculative to ensure you develop practices of argumentation. I also ask that you listen to yourself and consider yourself as only one voice. Essay writing is a time to synthesize reading, listening, and speaking into a formal and unified entity. Please drop in to student hours as often as possible to discuss your thoughts—college is an amazing time of intellectual stimulation; use it to your fullest. If you’ve read this far, send me a picture of your favorite musician for extra credit.

Correspondence: It is required that all emails contain a salutation and signature, and that they be written with clarity and courtesy. All emails must list the course in the subject heading as well as a brief description of the email. Please allow for 48 hours for a response. I typically don’t email over the weekends or after 5pm. I do not open emails that ask to alert the sender that the email has been opened, so please disable that setting from your devices. I do not answer questions via email about papers less than 24-hours before the deadline. This means you should take care of most of your queries in advance.

NOTES ON CLASS ORGANIZATION

There will be additional short in-class “free-write” assignments that are not listed on the syllabus.

Supplemental readings will be on Moodle.

Regarding absences: If you or someone you care for are ill and cannot do the work, be in touch to the best of your ability and we will come up with a plan. Chronic absenteeism is unacceptable, however.

Remember and feel empowered by the fact that you have a choice in whether or not to be here. The College has instituted flexible deadlines for dropping and withdrawal.

We will take periodic breaks for water and refreshing. Please let me know when you're feeling the need for a break. I can get "carried away" when discussing ideas.

Early in the semester we will develop a community agreement that we will adhere to and revise as necessary. We will be discussing sensitive material. If you are made uncomfortable in class, please let me know. You can email me for a chat during my office hours. I would appreciate the feedback, even if it's about mistakes that I have made.

In general, if you are concerned about ongoing classroom situations or troubled by classroom incidents, do not wait until the semester has ended to report them. Your best option is to request an appointment with the department chair, who may be able to intervene at once, or the Student Ombuds, who will keep your concerns confidential, help you strategize, connect you to the right people or resources, and relay your concerns confidentially to the Dean. You are also welcome to seek advice from your faculty advisor.