

# Modern World Fiction

## Course Description:

As an IMSA student, you spent your first year-and-a-half in the core English courses, learning about foundational texts of American and British literature. But what comes after – what builds upon these foundations today? And what about the literatures of non-western cultures?

This course endeavors to explore and to answer these questions. In this section of Modern World Fiction, you will examine some of the most acclaimed world authors of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. You'll read authors from ten different nationalities spanning five continents. The reading list includes five Nobel Prize winners for literature – Yasunari Kawabata (Japan, 1952), Gabriel García Márquez (Columbia, 1982), Toni Morrison (USA, 1993), Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru, 2010), and Mo Yan (China, 2012).

Of the American authors, you will read five who have won National Book Awards, two others who were finalists for the National Book Award, and five Pulitzer Prize winners (including the 2016 winner), and the 2017 Man Booker Prize winner – nearly all of these awards coming in the last fifteen years. Seven titles in this course have been published in the last year.

We will read several novels. We will also explore a brief play, and devote considerable time to short stories. In so doing, we will attempt to uncover not only the modern concerns – personal, social, and sometimes political – unique to these cultures, but also the universal questions and topics that have fascinated all of mankind throughout time.

## INSTRUCTOR:

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## Meeting Days, Time and Room(s)

*TBD*

## Text(s) / Materials:

You will be expected to bring your current reading packets (critical essays, short stories, and novellas), whether in paper or .pdf form, to class, and your copies of our core texts as we read and discuss them:

Wyl Menmuir, *The Many*.

Kawabata, Yasunari. *Thousand Cranes*

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*.

Computers will be used regularly, as this class strives to be paper-free (as much as can be done practically), so be sure to bring it and your power supply regularly. Also, a copy of whatever our

current reading is (when available in print) and a writing utensil for marking that reading are crucially important.

### **Participation**

My expectation is that, at least once per class, you voluntarily respond to a question or comment from your teacher or another student. I want this class to be based on your questions and discussions about them. As to why participation in class is important beyond your grade, consider these statements from some of today's business leaders:

*"We are routinely surprised at the difficulty some young people have in communicating: verbal skills, written skills, presentation skills. They have difficulty being clear and concise; it's hard for them to create focus, energy, and passion around the points they want to make."*

-- Mike Summers, VP for Global Talent Management at Dell

*"I want people who can engage in good discussion—who can look me in the eye and have a give and take. All of our work is done in teams. You have to know how to work well with others. But you also have to know how to engage customers—to find out what their needs are. If you can't engage others, then you won't learn what you need to know."*

-- Clay Parker, engineer and president of the Chemical Management Division of BOC Edwards

*"People who've learned to ask great questions and have learned to be inquisitive are the ones who move the fastest in our environment because they solve the biggest problems in ways that have the most impact on innovation."*

-- Mike Summers, VP for Global Talent Management at Dell

*All quotations taken from "Rigor Redefined" (2008) by Tony Wagner of the Harvard Graduate School of Education.*

### **Notes...**

I expect you to take notes in this class. For every paper I assign in this class, you will have the option to propose your own topic. Think of your class and reading notes as massive brainstorms for your own unique papers.

### **...and Laptops**

**The default position for your laptop in this class is closed.** This means, from the moment class starts, unless I ask you to use it, I don't expect to see it open. We will use the laptops frequently for in-class work and research and even for online readings, but to the greatest extent possible, this will be a laptop-free class. Here's why:

Researchers have repeatedly found that students who use laptops in class learn less than their "disconnected" peers (see Cornell's 2003 study "The Laptop and the Lecture"). Studies at Princeton and the University of California have found students who take notes on laptops performed worse on evaluations such as quizzes than those who took notes by hand "even when laptops are used solely to take notes, they may still be impairing learning because their use results in shallower processing" ("The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard," 2014).

But laptop use in class harms more than just the user – it also negatively impacts students seated nearby. Sana, Weston, et al (2013) found that:

participants who multitasked on a laptop during a lecture scored lower on a test compared to those who did not multitask, and participants who were in direct view of a multitasking peer scored lower on a test compared to those who were not. The results demonstrate that multitasking on a laptop poses a significant distraction to both users and fellow students and can be detrimental to comprehension of lecture content.

Therefore, I require that you please keep your laptop closed during class unless you have been specifically asked to use it, and I would encourage you to keep it closed in other classes, as well.

If you have a special need that requires accommodation in this area, please see me.

### **Essential Content:**

[Taken from English Learning Standards at <https://www3.imsa.edu/learning/standards/english.php>]

This course will focus on a range of concepts central to the English team learning standards, but most particularly:

G. Students studying English at IMSA will use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g. for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information) by: [NCTE-12]

G.7 writing in both expressive and transactional modes. [SSL-I.A, IV.B]

### **Instructional Design and Approach:**

Literature is, at its core, an articulation of the history of ideas. As such, it is both part and product of history, anthropology, philosophy, art, psychology, science, and other fields. Our examination of literature will thus study it through these various lenses, while also fostering an appreciation for its aesthetic value and approach. We will explore literature through reading, writing, discussing, researching, and – sometimes – performing it. Activities and assignments will range from individual to small group to broad class discussion. With every reading, students should challenge themselves to consider three questions: do I like this, what does this mean, and why is it important today?

### **Student Expectations:**

To succeed in this class, you must: arrive on time, be prepared by having read AND prepared to discuss or ask questions about the assigned materials (not just online summaries), be active in small group **and** classroom discussion, and demonstrate originality, thorough research, and comprehensive thought on papers and assignments. Being funny doesn't hurt, either.

**Course Work / Assessment:**

<i>Papers</i>	80%
<i>In-Class Activities, Quizzes, Participation</i>	10%
<i>Student Led Discussion</i>	10%

*Approximate Paper Point Distribution:*

<i>Paper One (Compare/Contrast)</i>	100
<i>Paper Two (Draft)</i>	50
<i>Paper Two (Revision)</i>	100
<i>Paper Three (Research)</i>	150
<i>“Things...Carried” (Modeling)</i>	50
<i>Paper Four (Anthology Intro)</i>	100

All items on Syllabus are subject to change.

### **Sequence of Topics and Activities**

Reading Due on date indicated by // (usually A / B or C / D)

#### **Introduction to Modern Literature: The Short Story; Native American**

Week One: Introductions / Saunders, "Civilwarland in Bad Decline" / "Tenth of December"

Week Two: Carver "A Small, Good Thing" / Alexie "This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona,"  
Erdrich "The Flower" / Serizawa "Train to Harbin"

#### **Asia: Japan**

Week Three: Kawabata, *Thousand Cranes*

Week Four: Kawabata, *Thousand Cranes*

#### **United States**

Week Five (short C, no D): Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Week Six (DIAD): Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Week Seven (ABCDI): Johnson "Teen Sniper" / Johnson "Fortune Smiles" / Doerr "The Shell Collector"

Week Eight: Packer "Brownies" / Scott "202 Checkmates" / Muñoz "The Reason is Because"

#### **South/Central American: Chile, Peru, Columbia, Antigua**

Week Nine: Márquez, "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings," / Allende  
"Prologue," "Two Words," "Wicked Girl," "Revenge" / Kincaid "Girl," Vargas Llosa  
"The Cubs"

#### **Asia: India and Indian American**

Week Ten (short D): Lahiri "The Third and Final Continent," Rao "Kavitha and Mustafa" /  
Chakrabarti "A Small Sacrifice for an Enormous Happiness" / Swamy "A Simple  
Composition," "Night Garden"

[spring break]

#### **Asia: China, Chinese American, Vietnamese American**

Week Eleven: Mo Yan "Bull" / Nguyen "Black-Eyed Women" / Jen "The Third Dumpster"  
Chiang "The Great Silence"

#### **Miscellaneous American, Italian**

Week Twelve: Bergman "The Siege at Whale Cay" / Saunders "I Can Speak!" "In Persuasion  
Nation" / Gordon "Ugly"

Week Thirteen: Peroni "Protection," O'Connor "A Good Man is Hard to Find" / O'Brien "The Things  
They Carried" / Klay "Redeployment"

#### **Africa: Nigeria, Ghana (and one more Indian American)**

Week Fourteen (no D): Adichie "Apollo" / Ali "Ravalushan" / Iyer "The Mongerji Letters"

#### **Europe: England**

Week Fifteen: Menmuir, *The Many* (or Jaqueline Woodson, *Another Brooklyn?*)

Week Sixteen: Menmuir, *The Many* (or Jaqueline Woodson, *Another Brooklyn?*)

#### **Africa: South Africa (Drama)**

Week Seventeen: Fugard, *Master Harold and the Boys*

Week Eighteen (short C): TBA

### Authors Covered in this Section of Modern World Fiction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (b. 1977) O. Henry Prize (2003, 2016). Nigeria.

Sherman Alexie (b. 1966) National Book Award for Young People's Literature for *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007); PEN/Faulkner Award for *War Dances* (2009). Spokane/Coeur d'Alene/America.

Mohammed Naseehu Ali (b. 1971). *Best American Short Stories* author, 2016. Ghana.

Isabel Allende (b. 1942) Chilean National Prize for Literature (2010); Presidential Medal of Freedom (U.S., 2014). Chile.

Megan Mayhew Bergman (b. 1979). *Best American Short Stories* author, 2015. America.

Raymond Carver (1938-1988) Revolutionized the short story in the 1980's. America.

Jai Chakrabarti (b. ?) O. Henry Prize (2017), *Best American Short Stories* author (2017). Indian American.

Ted Chiang (Chiang Feng-nan) (b. 1967) Nebula Award (1990, 1998, 2007), Hugo Award (2002, 2009), *Best American Short Stories* author (2016). Chinese American.

Anthony Doerr (b. 1973) Pulitzer Prize for *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014). America.

Louise Erdrich (b. 1954) National Book Award for *The Round House* (2012), Pushcart Prize in Poetry (1983), O. Henry Award for "Fleur" (1987). *Best American Short Stories* author, 2016. America/Chippewa/Anishinaabe.

Athol Fugard. (b. 1932). Tony Award for Best Play for *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead / The Island* (1975); Tony for Lifetime Achievement in Theater (2011). South Africa/Australia.

Mary Gordon (b. 1949) *Best American Short Stories* author (2017). American.

Geetha Iyer (b. ?) O. Henry Prize (2016). India/ United Arab Emerites.

Gish Jen (b. 1955) *Best American Short Stories* author (1988, 1995, 2013). Chinese American.

Adam Johnson (b. 1967) Pulitzer Prize for *The Orphan Master's Son* (2012), National Book Award for *Fortune Smiles* (2015). America.

Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972) Nobel Prize for Literature (1968). Japan.

Jamaica Kincaid (b. 1949) Shortlisted for Pen/Faulkner Award for *At the Bottom of the River* (1984) and *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1997). Antigua.

Phil Klay (b. 1983) National Book Award for *Redeployment* (2014). America.

Jhumpa Lahiri (b. 1967) Pulitzer Prize and PEN/Hemingway Awards for *The Interpreter of Maladies* (2000). India/Bengal/America.

Mario Vargas Llosa (b. 1938) Nobel Prize for Literature (2010). Peru.

Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014) Nobel Prize for Literature (1982). Columbia.

Wyl Menmuir (b. 1979) Booker Prize nominee for *The Many* (longlist, 2016). England.

Toni Morrison (b. 1931) National Book Award, Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved* (1988), Nobel Prize for Literature (1993). America.

Manuel Muñoz (b. 1972) O. Henry anthology (2015, 2017) Mexican American.

Viet Thanh Nguyen (b. 1971) Pulitzer Prize for *The Sympathizer* (2016). Vietnam/America.

Tim O'Brien (b. 1946) National Book Award for *Going After Cacciato* (1979). America.

ZZ Packer (b. 1973) PEN/Faulkner Award Finalist for *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere* (2003). America.

Paola Peroni (b. ?) O. Henry Prize (2017). Italy.

Shobha Rao (b. ?) Katherine Anne Porter Prize in Fiction (2014), *Best American Short Stories* author (2016). India/America.

George Saunders (b. 1958) Man Booker Prize (2017) for *Lincoln in the Bardo*, National Book Award Finalist for *Tenth of December* (2013); winner of PEN/Malamud Award (2013). America.

Rion Amilcar Scott (b. ?) PEN award for debut fiction for *Insurrections* (2017). America.

Asako Serizawa (b. ?) Pushcart Prize (2016), O. Henry Prize (2013, 2016). Japan.

Shruti Swamy (b. ?) O. Henry Prize anthology (2016, 2017). Indian American.

Jaqueline Woodson (b. 1963) National Book Award for *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014). American

Mo Yan (b. 1955) Nobel Prize for Literature (2012). China.