

Tutorial 100-31: The American “I am”: Autobiography & US Literatures

****Updated 24 August 2017**

Prof. Elizabeth Rodrigues
Office location: Burling 115
Office Hours: M 2-4pm, Th 1-3pm & by appt

email: rodrigue8@grinnell.edu
Phone: x3362
T/Th 8:00-9:50am, Carnegie 314

Consulting Librarian: Phil Jones [jonesphi]
CLS Advisor: Stephanie Burrows [burrows]
Peer Writing Mentor: Michael Cummings [cummings]

Course website: <https://americaniam.sites.grinnell.edu/>

Companion documents: Schedule of readings & assignments; Advising syllabus

The American “I am” is, and has always been, a complex and contingent statement. This tutorial will examine U.S. American literatures through the lens of autobiographical narrative. Working across genres to consider multiple moments and occasions for the construction and publication of American life stories, we will first engage with specific writers, texts, places, and historical contexts. By closely examining how these writers formulate their definition of and claim to (or refusal of) American identity through the telling of a life story, we will develop practices of attention, analysis, and argumentation. We will seek to contextualize these narratives historically, to consider multiple disciplinary approaches to the life story as a form, and to pose critical questions: how do we define “American” literature, and why/in what contexts would these definitions matter? What are the recurring narrative tropes of American life stories? How do writers adapt and critique these tropes? In what ways do race, gender, and other social categories inflect these adaptations and critiques?

Objectives of Tutorial:

To introduce students to

1. College-level writing forms and expectations (50% of grade + substantial feedback)
2. Critical reading skills
3. College-level oral communication skills
4. A librarian and library resources
5. Academic honesty policy and practices

Required texts:

Wright, *Black Boy*
Eggers, *Zeitoun*
Bechdel, *Fun Home*

All other readings will be available in electronic versions through the Library, using the catalog, databases, or electronic reserves. Links to these materials are provided in the bibliography on our



course website. We will practice accessing these materials in class, but if you have trouble, get help (chat, peer research tutor, or emailing query@grinnell.edu).

These readings include content that represents violence, including sexual violence, racial violence, and state violence. If you find yourself having a personal or emotional response to the readings, subject matter, or discussions, I suggest you make an appointment with a counselor at [SHACS](#) (Student Health and Counseling Services). They are located on the Lower Level of the Forum. Their phone number is 641-269-3230. I am happy to help you make an appointment.

Grading

Students will earn final grades based on the following distributions:

Engagement & participation, including attendance: 25%

Response essay: not graded

Blog posts & comments: 10%

Discussion leader/note taker days: 5%

Paper 1: 10%

Paper 2: 15%

Paper 3: 5%

Paper 4: 20%

Keyword presentation: 10%

- Papers 1 and 2 are required to be revised. The revision grade will replace the prior grade. **This does not mean that the first turned-in version is a draft.** If I determine that students are not turning in polished essays the first time around, I will begin averaging the grades.
- Any paper can be revised at any point before the end of the term, but you must meet with me before you submit any elective revision.
- I will take improvement over the course of the semester into account when determining your final grade.
- Your grade can be bolstered through attending and reporting on relevant campus events outside of class. I've drawn attention to a few of these in the syllabus. I hope you will seek out others. If you would like to receive credit for these, you may either write it up in a blog post (~200 words) or email me for a time to make a 2-minute presentation on it in class. Your writing or presentation should avoid summary and try to answer a question, such as: what was one thing that surprised you and why? what was one question you thought of for the speaker? what will you look at differently because of engaging with this event?
- Each student has 2 "personal days" that can be used for wellness or other purposes. If you have more than two absences without a documented accommodation, health issue, or emergency, your participation grade will suffer. If you have more than four unexcused absences, you will receive a participation grade of zero.
- If you must miss class, please refrain from asking what you missed over email. You may consult the notes prepared by your colleagues or come to office hours.

Workload

Tutorial is a 4-credit course. You should expect to average 8-12 hours a week of work outside of class for this course. Some weeks may require more and some weeks may require less. If you find yourself struggling to complete the work for this course in that time frame, please come and meet with me. Coursework at Grinnell is rigorous, but it should not feel impossible.

Guidelines and Expectations

This classroom is a community of inquiry composed of individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences coming together to learn. To that end:

- Please come to every class, on time, and for the full scheduled time.
- Please prepare for class by reading, taking notes, and formulating questions.
- Please contribute to our conversation, both by listening and speaking.
- Please give every activity the best effort you are able.
- Please challenge yourself.
- Please find a way to ask for help rather than panic, worry, or give up.
- Please find a way to support your colleagues in these efforts.
- Expect to make mistakes. Expect others to make mistakes. Please be generous.
- Try not to make assumptions, especially about people.

Intentional Use of Technology

Laptop computers and other devices for screen-based reading, writing, communicating, and discovering complementary materials are valuable tools. I welcome them in our classroom as tools. My experience as a teacher, student, and scholar has taught me that harnessing their power as tools requires mindful and reflective use. I have had to develop practices for checking in with myself to see if what I'm doing at any given moment is contributing to or distracting from my goals. Tutorial is a good place to develop such practices for yourself.

- Please turn off all audio notifications before class starts.
- Consider setting up a time management tool such as Rescue Time to gain awareness of how you are using your laptop and disable distracting sites during class time.
- I will ask you to attempt multiple forms of reading, note-taking, writing, and communication. Some of these will use computers and the Internet, and some explicitly will not. I ask that you experiment in good faith, knowing that I will not ask you to change your habits permanently and that I will give you a chance to reflect on and decide what modes of reading, writing, and discussion work best for you. (Exception: any student with a documented disability requiring technological accommodation for classroom activities.)
- If devices are used in a distracting manner (e.g. texting, someone not participating in small group work because they are answering email, multiple people tuned out on Facebook leading to lackluster discussion), I will call attention to it publicly.

Support for Writing and Research

Students who make use of Grinnell's extensive professional and peer mentoring opportunities tend to improve the most as writers and scholars.

- This course will have a peer writing mentor, Michael Cummings '18 [cummings]. Michael's role in our course will include individual and group meetings, input in assignment and activity design, and managing our blog. I hope you will reach out to him often to ask questions or just to talk about the course.
- I highly encourage you to reach out to the consulting librarian for this course, Phil Jones [jonesphi], with research questions in any of your classes this term.
- I also highly recommend visiting the [Writing Lab](#) and [Reading Lab](#).

Honesty/Intellectual Integrity

Grinnell College's Academic Honesty policy is located in the Student Handbook available online for the 2017-18 academic year at [http://catalog.grinnell.edu/content.php?catoid=12&navoid=2537#Honesty in Academic Work](http://catalog.grinnell.edu/content.php?catoid=12&navoid=2537#Honesty_in_Academic_Work).

It is the College's expectation that students be aware of and meet the expectations expressed in this policy. While classroom discussion, peer review, and partner presentations are expected to be highly collaborative, all writing must be your own work. If you have questions about how a particular assignment relates to the College's policy, I will gladly consult with you in advance of the assignment's due date.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

I strive to create a fully inclusive classroom, thus I welcome individual students to approach me about distinctive learning needs. In particular, I encourage students with disabilities to have a conversation with me and disclose how our classroom or course activities could impact the disability and what accommodations would be essential. You will also need to have a conversation about and provide documentation of your disability to the Coordinator for Disability Resources, John Hirschman, located on the 3rd floor of the Rosenfield Center, 641-269-3089.

Religious Holidays

I encourage students who plan to observe holy days that coincide with class meetings or assignment due dates to consult with me in the first three weeks of classes so that we may reach a mutual understanding of how you can meet the terms of your religious observance and also the requirements for this course.

Acknowledgments

This syllabus and all course materials have been prepared in conversation with and modeled on the example of many generous colleagues, including but not limited to: Dr. Carolyn Herbst Lewis, Dr. Carolyn Jacobson, Dr. Shanna Benjamin, Dr. Kelly Herold, Dr. Timothy Arner, and Joyce Stern.