School of Communication and the Arts

ACL1001: Reading Contemporary Fiction

Unit Guide
2012
We acknowledge the Elders, families and forebears of the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung tribes of the Kulin Nation who were the custodians of University land for many centuries. We acknowledge that the land on which we meet was the place of age old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal and that the Kulin Nation people’s living culture had and has a unique role in the life of this region.

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**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Website**
The Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development hosts a website which contains a number of documents which you will find useful. The address for this is: http://www.vu.edu.au/Faculties/Arts_Education_and_Human_Development/Student_Information/

On this site you will find:

**How to select your units and work out your timetable** – this offers an overview of degree structures.

**The timetable** – here you will find the times of classes and the rooms where they are held. It is worth checking these details close to the start of semester in case anything has changed.

**Useful web addresses** – this shows you how to access your VU email address. You will find that the faculty, your lecturers and tutors will send you important emails during the semester and it is crucial that you are able to access this information.

**Assignment cover sheets** – you can download these sheets here.

**Students’ rights and responsibilities** – this is a list of what you can expect from studying at university, and what the university expects from you.

**Plagiarism** – there is a student’s guide to plagiarism, how to avoid it and the penalties involved in engaging in plagiarism or academic dishonesty available here.

**Essay guide online** – here you will find a guide to the writing and presenting of essays. It contains an overview of structuring essays, of providing comprehensive references (Oxford, Harvard and APA) and of compiling a reference list.

**Enrolling as a non-award student** – this is an overview of enrolling in single units rather than in a whole degree.

**Other useful information:**

**Teaching and Learning Support** (http://tls.vu.edu.au/students.htm) – there are a number of academic support services offered to students which include:

- Study skills workshops
- Transitional issues for students new to higher education
- FAQs - the questions often asked by students
- Skills needed for your studies e.g. oral presentations
- General study skills - What is a lecture? What is a tutorial?
- Exam techniques
- Writing academic essays
- Information specific to particular units or courses
- Postgraduate and international students
- Mentoring
- Plagiarism

**Handing in assignments**
Assignments are to be submitted to the tutor’s pigeonhole and as an electronic attachment unless otherwise stated in the Unit Guide.

**Penalties for late assignments**
Late assignments (without an extension) will be penalized at a reduction of 20% per week late.

**Special consideration**
If you feel that illness or personal difficulties have impaired your performance you may ask for Special Consideration which can facilitate late submission, and alternative arrangements for assignments. This can cover both emotional and physical difficulties. You need to contact a student counsellor to arrange this.

**Arrangements for disabled students**
Students with disabilities need to register with Equity and Social Justice.
INTRODUCTION
In the past thirty years, the way we read and write literature – and definitions of the ‘literary’ itself – have increasingly been the focus of intensive debates. These debates have altered the ways we think about literary texts. Terms like ‘literature’ and ‘fiction’ have become difficult to use without careful thought and qualification. Another result has been the challenging of the notions of ‘national literatures’ and the ‘literary canon’ that have dominated the institutionalised study of literature in the West since the 18th century. This Unit examines a number of contemporary fictional texts in order to introduce students to a number of the recent developments and debates in literary studies. The Unit pays particular attention to issues like class, gender, place, race, and ethnicity.

Format:
The Unit is structured around a weekly one-hour lecture and a two-hour tutorial. Students must attend a weekly one hour lecture and two hour tutorial.

Footscray Park
Lecture: Monday 15:00-16:00, Room D.232
Tutorials:
1) Monday 16:00 – 18:00, Room C410B – Lynette Frey
2) Monday 16:00 – 18:00, Room C410 – Andrew Webster
3) Wednesday 9:00 – 11:00, Room C502B – Scott McCulloch
4) Wednesday 11:00 – 13:00, Room C502B – Natalie Kon-yu
5) Wednesday 16:00 – 18:00, Room L006 – Natalie Kon-yu
6) Thursday 9:00 -11:00, Room C410A – Lynette Frey
7) Tuesday 16:00 – 18:00, Room D531 – Andrew Webster
8) Friday 12:00 –14:00, Room D202 - Scott McCulloch

Class Materials:
The required reading for this Unit includes four novels and a Unit Reader. The novels are as follows:
Kalinda Ashton’s *The Danger Game*
Witi Ihimaera’s *The Uncle’s Story*
Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby*
Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*

The novels and the Unit Reader will be available for purchase from the University bookshop.

Staff:
Unit Coordinator: Dr Natalie Kon-yu
Ph: 9919 2036; Email: natalie.konyu@vu.edu.au
Office: 7.307 (St Albans campus)

Learning Outcomes:
1. Students will learn to present literary arguments in a variety of verbal and textual settings and formats.
2. Students will be introduced to the practice of tutorial discussion and debate in which problem solving is an important aspect.
3. The literary texts studied will ensure students negotiate literary representations of diverse cultures.

Core Graduate Attributes:
1. is an effective problem solver in a range of settings, including professional practice
2. can locate, evaluate, manage and use information effectively
3. communicates effectively
4. can work both autonomously and collaboratively
5. can work effectively in settings of social and cultural diversity

Supplementary Assessment:
Students who achieve a final result between 45 and 49% will be given the opportunity to complete a supplementary assessment.
UNIT OUTLINE

Week 1 (Beginning 27th February)
Topic: Outline of the Unit
Lecture: Students will be introduced to the topics and novels covered in ACL1001 Reading Contemporary Fiction as well as the assessment requirements for the Unit.
Tutorial: Introduction of students to each other and to the tutor; discussion of student and lecturer/tutor expectations for the Unit; review of reading and assessment requirements.

Essential Reading: No Readings

Week 2 (Beginning 5th March)
Topic: Reading Contemporary Fiction
Lecture: This lecture will trace the rise of the study of Literature in Britain and beyond, paying particular attention to the work of F.R. Leavis. It will also focus on ways of defining and reading contemporary fiction.
Tutorial Question: What is Literature, and why?

Essential Reading:

Week 3 (Beginning 12th March)
Topic: The Short Story
Lecture: This lecture will look at the form of the short story, comparing it to that of the novel. It will discuss the techniques of short story writing using examples from the short stories in the Unit reader.
Tutorial Question: What are the main differences between the short story and the novel? Discuss with reference to at least two of the short stories in the Unit Reader.

Diagnostic Test: Students will be given a diagnostic test during this tutorial.

Essential Reading:
Week 4 (Beginning 19th March)

Topic: Grunge Writing: Before and After

Lecture: This lecture will focus on the emergence of ‘grunge’ literature and the debates surrounding its reception and marketability.

Tutorial: Is grunge fiction ‘anti-literary’? Discuss with reference to Kalinda Ashton’s The Danger Game.

Essential Reading:


Week 5 (Beginning 26th March)

Topic: Identity and Place in Literature: Kalinda Ashton’s The Danger Game

Lecture: Constructions of the self and the importance of place in Kalinda Ashton’s The Danger Game will be discussed. Close attention will be paid to the ways in which Ashton’s novel relates to the grunge genre.

Tutorial: Is Kalinda Ashton’s The Danger Game an example of post-grunge? How?

Essential Reading:
Georgia Arnott, review of The Danger Game, ABR, Dec 2009, p. 65

Week 6 (Beginning 2nd April)

Topic: Toni Morrison and Black Writing

Lecture: This lecture will look at the concerns of African-American literature, particularly the novels of Toni Morrison. It will contextualise Black writing in terms of the United States’ history of slavery, emancipation and the civil rights movement.

Tutorial: Why do many African-American writers use the novel form to re-write the official history of the United States? Discuss with reference to Toni Morrison’s Tar Baby.

Essential Reading:

Rachel Lister, ‘Toni Morrison and the Novel’ in Reading Toni Morrison, Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2009

MID-SEMESTER BREAK: 6th – 13th April

Week 7 (Beginning 16th April)

Topic: Reading Race, Class and Gender in Toni Morrison’s Tar Baby

Lecture: This lecture will focus on issues of gender, race and class in Toni Morrison’s Tar Baby.

Tutorial: Who is the hunter and who is the hunted in Toni Morrison’s Tar Baby? Discuss with reference to gender, race and class.

Essential Reading:


Week 8 (Beginning 23rd April)

Post-colonial British Writing

Lecture: This lecture will look at the ways in which post-colonial British writing problematises the notion of cultural identity.

Tutorial: How can fiction challenge the notion of national/cultural identity? Discuss with reference to Zadie Smith’s White Teeth.

Essential Reading:
Week 9 (Beginning 30th April)

Topic: Re-writing Englishness: Zadie Smith’s White Teeth

Lecture: This lecture will focus on the ways in which recent British novels, including White Teeth, have written back to the grand narratives about England and Englishness.

Tutorial: Do the multiple narrative voices in Zadie Smith’s White Teeth disrupt the idea of a singular national identity? Is there a dominant narrative voice in the text?

Essential Reading:
Chuck Leddy, ‘Zadie Smith’s world view: The acclaimed British author crosses racial and cultural boundaries’, Writer, 119, 2 (February 2006)


Week 10 (Beginning 7th May)

Topic: New Zealand Writing

Lecture: This lecture will trace the changes in New Zealand’s literary culture since the beginning of the 20th century. It will pay particular attention to postcolonial literature, particular that which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s.

Tutorial: What is the importance of a postcolonial approach to writing about New Zealand? Reference must be made to Witi Ihimaera’s The Uncle’s Story.

Essential Reading:


Week 11 (Beginning 14th May)

Topic: Witi Ihimaera’s The Uncle’s Story

Lecture: This lecture will discuss the twin narratives in Witi Ihimaera’s The Uncle’s Story: the coming-out narrative and the narrative of Maori cultural identity. It will provide a postcolonial reading of Witi Ihimaera’s novel.

Tutorial: Does Witi Ihimaera articulate ‘multiple views of cultural and sexual identity’ (Tawake, p. 376) in The Uncle’s Story?

Essential Reading:
Margaret Meklin and Andrew Meklin, ‘This Magnificent Accident: An Interview with Witi Ihimaera’, The Contemporary Pacific, 16, 2 (Fall 2004): 358-366.


Week 12 (Beginning 21st May)

Topic: Unit Summary

Lecture: This lecture will highlight the key terms and concepts covered in the Unit.

Tutorial: Students will be given an opportunity to ask questions about any of the topics covered in the Unit.

Essential Reading: No Readings
ASSESSMENT

The assessment for this unit is as follows:

1. Tutorial Presentation 20%
2. Short Essay 30%
3. Long Essay 50%

1. Tutorial Presentation
You are required to give a tutorial presentation on one of the week’s topics. Which week you are to focus on will be decided in your first tutorial with your tutor.

In this presentation, you MUST NOT only summarise the week’s tutorial readings, you should also present new material, raise issues which enhance your tutorial group’s understanding of the week’s topic, and have at least three questions to ask the tutorial group at the end of your presentation. You should ensure you fully cover the tutorial topic, answering the question for that week in this outline.

The tutorial presentation should be 10-15 minutes in length. Students are encouraged to use visual aids (i.e. overhead transparencies, PowerPoint slides etc) when it is practical and appropriate to do so. Students who fail to attend class on the day of their presentation will be given a mark of 0 unless they have medical certification.

Assessment Criteria:

A satisfactory completion of assignment requires:

CONTENT
- The set readings have been clearly and succinctly explained and analysed
- The material has been related to the major themes of the subject and developed the week’s specific topic
- The presentation provides a clear response to the tutorial question.
- All secondary sources have been properly referenced.

PRESENTATION
- The presenter spoke clearly and referred to rather than read from notes
- The presenter involved other students through questions, discussion prompters etc
- The presenter utilised presentation aids (where appropriate)
- The presenter promoted class discussion and managed that discussion

Due Date: The tutorial that corresponds with the chosen topic.
Weighting: 20%

2. Short Essay
The short essay is a written response to the tutorial question you presented on in class. It must be written in essay format and be properly referenced using the Harvard System. The theoretical material provided in the Unit reader must be referred to in your response.

The short essay must be handed to your tutor in hard copy during class time. It must also be submitted electronically as an attachment to your tutor’s email account. A hard copy and an electronic copy MUST be submitted.

Assessment Criteria:

A satisfactory completion of assignment requires:
- Providing an accurate and complete bibliography
- Giving references in the essay for all quotations and ideas taken from other sources
- Using the Harvard Referencing System
- Drawing upon theories introduced in lectures and readings
- Answering the whole question
- Keeping to the word limit
- Editing for coherence and repetition
- Proof reading for spelling, expression and syntax
- Submitting both a hard and electronic copy

Due Date: One week after the presentation
Word Length: 1000 words
Weighting: 30%
3. Long Essay

Choose one of the following topics:

1) Discuss the representation of race and racial difference in at least two of the novels covered in the unit.
   *You might like to discuss whether race is a fundamentally important consideration in interpreting these texts, and whether whiteness is represented in them as an identity.*

2) Each of the set novels in the course presents different versions of history. Choose at least two of these novels and compare their representations of history, as well as the sorts of history they represent (race, family, class, place, etc). Do the texts make arguments about the need to rethink and rewrite particular kinds of histories?

3) Questions of family are important in each of the novels covered in the unit. Choose at least two novels and discuss their representations of family. Is family a repressive force; is it an empowering one? How do questions of family relate to issues like class, race and gender?

It is essential that you *draw upon the theoretical material provided in the Unit Reader* when responding to the essay question and also demonstrate that you have done further research. The long essay *MUST include at least three references* from academic texts found in and through the library (not internet sites). All texts consulted *must be properly referenced* using the Harvard System.

The long essay must be placed in your tutor’s pigeonhole on the due date. It must also be submitted electronically as an attachment to your tutor’s email account. A hard copy and an electronic copy MUST be submitted.

**Assessment Criteria:**

A satisfactory completion of assignment requires:
- Using at least three references from academic texts (not internet sites)
- Providing an accurate and complete bibliography
- Giving references in the essay for all quotations and ideas taken from other sources
- Using the Harvard Referencing System
- Drawing upon theories introduced in lectures and readings
- Answering the whole question
- Keeping to the word limit
- Editing for coherence and repetition
- Proof reading for spelling, expression and syntax
- Submitting both a hard and electronic copy
- Providing your tutor with a stamped, self-addressed envelope for the return of the essay

Please note- all students must write about two different texts in the long essay and not use the same text they examined in their presentation and short essay. Any student who does so will receive a mark of 0 for this assessment.

Due Date: Friday 1st June, 2012. 4pm
Word Length: 2000 words
Weighting: 50%
Guidelines for Assessment Criteria:

Pass (50-59)
- Basic understanding of the topic and reference to theory
- Displays problems with written fluency, expression, analysis and interpretation
- Basic grasp of the main concepts, ideas and theories relevant to the topic
- Contains problems with presentation and formatting
- Contains little or no referencing or reference back to academic texts
- Basic use of relevant resources and research for the topic but not in any extended sense
- Basic skills in independent/original research and critical thinking
- Contains referenced appropriate bibliography however, contains some problems

Credit (60-69)
- Draws confidently upon a number of sources
- Contains a clear argument supported by evidence
- Goes well beyond basic understanding of the topic
- Competently written and with sound analysis and interpretation
- Ability to understand and apply with some originality the main conceptual ideas and theories relevant to the topic
- Minor errors only in presentation
- Appropriate use of relevant resources and research for the topic
- Some evidence of independent/original research and critical thinking
- Appropriately formatted and referenced notes and bibliography

Distinction (70-79)
- Fluently written and with strong evidence of sophistication in analysis and interpretation
- Strong conceptual grasp of relevant ideas and theories
- Very good support of general arguments with appropriate illustrations and examples
- Minor errors only in presentation
- Appropriate use of relevant sources and research including some work not recommended by lecturer for the topic
- Evidence of independent/original research and critical thinking
- Appropriately formatted and referenced notes and bibliography

High Distinction (80-100)
- Shows originality and an ability to assess and consistently apply a theoretical framework
- Sophisticated expression and structure
- Shows a very high level of written fluency and intellectual sophistication in analysis and interpretation of topic
- Very high level of conceptual facility in dealing with relevant theories and ideas
- Detailed support of general arguments with appropriate illustrations and examples
- Virtually error-free in presentation and formatting
- Extended use of relevant sources and research beyond what is suggested for the assessment Strong evidence of independent/original research and critical thinking
- Appropriately formatted and referenced notes and bibliography