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Expos 20: Wastelands

I. COURSE OVERVIEW

Unit 1: Close Reading / Literary Wastelands

Representations of wastelands in literature typically revolve around ideas of emptiness, desolation, and depravity. But is any land ever really empty? Think of colonization. Entire continents have been declared vacant by invading nations. In this unit, we will read several short stories about wastelands. We will ask ourselves who and what these wastelands erase and to

what purpose. How do writers accomplish these erasures? What writing strategies do they use: metaphor, stereotype, hyperbole?

The goal of Unit I is to explain something that is not obvious about literary wastelands. In what ways does literature reinforce or complicate our assumptions about wastelands?

And, conversely, in what ways does it provide the tools we need to combat those assumptions? To convince your readers that your interpretation makes the most sense, you will need to draw on evidence from the story itself and explain how that evidence ought to be understood.

Unit 2: Test a Theory / Wastelands through the Lens

In Unit 2, we move beyond spectacle to the factual.

The goal of Unit 2 is to test a theory about wastelands. We will read Vinay Gidwani's paper, "Six Theses on Waste, Value, and Commons." Each thesis is an argument that Gidwani makes about the nature of real wastelands. Then we will watch two documentaries. The first is Vik Muniz's *Waste Land*, a film about the garbage pickers of Rio de Janeiro. The second is *Taking Root: The Vision of Wangari Maathai*, which chronicles the Greenbelt Movement in Kenya.

You will listen to what these films have to say about their respective wastelands. In your essay, you will compare your own observations against those made by Gidwani. Do his theses hold up against your own observations? And what new observations would you add in order to clarify and develop the nature of wastelands in the real world?

Unit 3: Research Essentials / Wastelands Today

For Unit 3, you will research a contemporary wasteland of your choosing. I will provide a list of possible research topics, but you are free to create a topic of your own.

As you look back through the pre-writings of your earlier papers, you will want to ask yourself what characteristic(s) of wasteland, or issues surrounding wastelands, excited, disturbed, or confused you? This will be a good way to brainstorm for your paper, and it may help you choose a wasteland worth exploring in a different context.

Context is key. Even though you may be researching a type of wasteland already covered in this course, the very fact that you are making a claim about a twenty-first century wasteland and not a nineteenth century wasteland makes a difference. To establish context is to consider all the factors that surround and inform your claim. Time is important, but context may also imply place, people, things, and actions.

This is where the research comes in. You might, for instance, be interested in the mega slums of Mumbai. But in order to make a claim about the slums, you need to know something about them. You need to know what makes the slums of Mumbai unique from, say, those of Rio de Janeiro. You might need to know what politics are at play or how the economy functions. Who has power, who does not, and why? The more you know, and the more research you use to support your argument, the more convincing your claim will be.

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Some of our writing goals in this course will change unit by unit, as you engage with different components of the academic essay. Other goals will remain constant. For instance, it will be an ongoing objective to strengthen and develop your arguments, expand your revision techniques, and improve your methods of analysis. One of the most crucial things to learn in a writing course is that the learning process never stops. We never "arrive" at a final destination as writers. We simply improve as we acquire experience and skill. With these goals in mind, we begin with two important premises:

- 1.) Good writing is a recursive process. You will develop and write preliminary response papers and essays, which we will discuss in conferences and for which you will receive feedback. You will then revise.
- 2.) Writing improves most when you possess clear ideas about what you want to accomplish. This class asks you to be self-reflective about your writing process: to regularly question and evaluate your work.

II. HOW THE COURSE WORKS

Required Texts and Materials

All assigned short stories are readily available online for free and will be linked through Canvas. Supplementary reading material will be provided via PDF on Canvas, and the films can be viewed through Kanopy, Harvard's online streaming service:
<http://harvard.kanopystreaming.com/>.

Conferences

In each unit of the course, you will submit short writing/research assignments, a draft of your essay, and a revision of your draft. After you submit your initial draft, I will provide you with feedback, and we will meet to discuss that feedback. These conferences give us the opportunity to work together on your revisions. My aim during conferences is not to give you a to-do list that will translate into an "A" on your revision. I am there to help you talk through your ideas while providing clarification on any feedback you may not understand.

Office Hours

Beyond conference week, you are of course free to see me during office hours about your ideas. My hours are posted on the syllabus.

E-mail

We will also communicate through Canvas regularly, but I may email you from time to time with announcements, so please do check your email on a daily basis. **I will check my email at least once every weekday in the mornings for your questions and concerns. Please note, however, that unless prior arrangements have been made, you should not assume that I will check email later than 5:00 p.m.** I answer most questions within 24 hours, except over the weekend.

Class Participation

One of the benefits of Expos is its small class size. That benefit is best realized when every student participates fully in the class. You learn much more from formulating, articulating, and questioning your own thoughts than from simply listening to one person lecture. Our time together is largely devoted to discussion and small group work; therefore, you are responsible for being prepared for daily participation. Being prepared for class means that you have given careful thought to the reading and writing assignments, and that you are ready to offer your own ideas and questions during our discussions.

Grades

The majority of your grade comes from your three essays, according to the following breakdown:

- **Participation:** 10%
- **Annotated Bibliography:** 10%
- **Essay #1:** 20%
- **Essay #2:** 25%
- **Essay #3:** 35%

The standard for each essay also becomes more demanding as we progress (since you are building on certain fundamental skills and techniques with each essay). Participation comes from discussion, your completion of assignments, and your thoughtful responses to the work of your peers during in-class workshops.

Attendance and Lateness

Because Expos proceeds by sequential instruction in analytical methodologies, your consistent attendance is essential.

Absences due to special events, such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts **are not** excusable absences. If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences, letting me know in advance. You are responsible for

getting from your classmates any notes/instruction that you may have missed. **If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you must directly petition the Director of Expository Writing**, who will grant such a petition only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

III. WRITTEN WORK

Submitting Essays

Drafts and revisions will be submitted as .doc or .docx files to our Canvas site. If you use word processing software such as Pages, please be sure that you are saving your work in a Word-friendly format. This will help minimize potential compatibility issues when we share our writing with one another. It will also minimize compatibility issues for citation software in the second and third units.

Deadlines

For many class meetings, you will be assigned a reading or writing exercise designed to help you develop your draft. Our work together in class will respond to, and build upon, those assignments. Therefore, it is imperative that you turn your work in on time. Of course, even in the most carefully organized semesters, unexpected circumstances can arise. **So I allow each student ONE 24-hour extension on a response paper, draft, or revision for the first two units.** To use that 24-hour extension without penalty, you must contact me before that deadline, submit the late work to the link provided on Canvas, and email me once you have submitted the work. Use this extension wisely. Taking the extension can be helpful in an emergency, but you might become crunched for time at the beginning of the next unit.

If you cannot meet a deadline due to a medical emergency, you should contact me right away, but please know that you may be required to produce a note from UHS. Family emergencies will likewise require notes from your dean.

Academic Honesty

Throughout the semester, we will work on proper use of sources, including how to cite them and how to avoid plagiarism. In Expos, we focus a great deal on reader response. As a result, you will frequently incorporate my feedback as well as that of your peers. If this feedback becomes a substantial part of your work and you need to acknowledge the impact someone has on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the Student Handbook; however, “You do not need to acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading.” In the end, all work you submit must be your own. Writing response papers, drafts, or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden. You will be asked to sign and submit a copy of the Honor Code with every revision.

Writing Center

At any stage of the writing process – brainstorming, draft reviews, revisions – you may want extra attention. The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. Regardless of the "strength" or "weakness" of the essay, all writing benefits from further review and a fresh perspective.