Expos 20: Representing Childhood (Fall 2018)

Course overview
The French modernist poet Charles Baudelaire famously called genius “childhood rediscovered at will,” and painters and writers of the 20th century looked to childhood for inspiration in their works. Their interest in childhood speaks to the prevalent attitude that children have curiosity, joy, and authenticity that are often lost after the transition to adulthood. But this understanding of childhood wasn’t always the case, nor is our current understanding of childhood so one-sided. On the contrary, historians have argued that prior to the 17th century children were often seen as faulty adults, and Christian doctrine considered them born into sin. Moreover, today, many argue that not all children get to partake equally of notions of childhood innocence as some childhoods are valued more highly than others. There also exists a contradiction in our cultural attitude toward children: to call someone “childlike” is likely to praise her; to call her “childish” is to critique. As these two words suggest, we can’t seem to decide if childhood is a state to be cherished and preserved at all costs or a condition to be overcome. In this course, we’ll take as our starting point the idea that much of what we think constitutes childhood today is actually a historical construction. As such, we see, children are particularly liable to be spoken for and about. But how much do adults really understand childhood and children? And what do their ideas about both categories say about them?

To begin to think about these questions, in Unit 1 we will read short stories from three very different writers: the science fiction writer Brian Aldiss of England and two contemporary writers: Ludmilla Petrushevskaya (Russia) and Lesley Nneka Arimah (England/Nigeria). Taken together, these three stories provide incisive critiques of society or human nature, or both. Aldiss’s story features a child trying to make sense of a dystopian future of overpopulation and loneliness; in Petrushevskaya’s one woman sets out to kill another’s baby; and in Arimah’s women fashion babies out of dolls into which older women breathe life (or don’t). You’ll practice some of the most essential skills of academic writing such as posing and answering an analytical question and using careful analysis to argue for an answer as you explore the complex issues these stories raise: Is what we value in children intrinsic to children themselves? What are the consequences to women, and to society at large, of our fixation on the youngest and smallest among us? When do struggles over children become about something more?

In Unit 2, we’ll shift our gaze to the highly controversial photographs of American photographer Sally Mann as we question the limits of acceptable representation of childhood. Mann photographed her three children for years as they grew up,
capturing beautiful, whimsical, as well as violent and disturbing moments of youth. Her collection *Immediate Family* took the art world by storm when it was first published in the 1990s and caused an eruption of controversy. What particularly angered some critics was the children’s nudity in many of the photos: Mann’s children, they argued, could not meaningfully consent to such photos circulating in the public sphere. In your essays for this unit, you will have a chance to engage in formal analysis as you consider the fraught relationship between adults and children. *Can* children meaningfully give consent? How is the responsibility of an artist toward his/her subjects different from that of a parent, and what happens when these two collide? What truth do photos claim to reveal and how objective is that truth? You will make an argument by putting images in conversation with theoretical texts as you arrive at a novel insight that emerges from doing so.

In Unit 3, we’ll take our discussion into the present by exploring the many ongoing debates that have childhood at their center, from genetic engineering and climate change to global human rights campaigns and immigration reform. More often than not, these debates are expressly political: at stake is the policy that shapes our complex social world. Using the critical-thinking skills as well as ideas you have been developing over the course of the semester, you will have the opportunity to identify an original research topic that is compelling to you and present an original argument about it.

**Course philosophy and goals**

While you are at Harvard, you will write papers of various kinds; discuss readings and debate issues from many perspectives; form questions and present possible answers in many different circumstances. In Expos 20, our goal is to help prepare you for all of those occasions, by focusing on the key elements of academic argument. At the foundation of all that work is the other primary goal of the course: to provide you not only with important skills but also with confidence about how best to communicate your good ideas.

The following three points form the foundation for our work this semester:

- **Writing is thinking.** The cornerstone of this course is the idea that learning to write is learning to think. *Writing* is one of the best ways to figure out your ideas, and the evolving writing process allows you to develop your thinking with greater depth and meaning. You will write frequent short assignments to help you develop the ideas you will use in your arguments and in our class discussions. Developing worthwhile ideas also takes time, and you’ll want to plan accordingly.

- **Writing is a process.** For all three of our essays in this course, you will write an initial draft and then a revision. This continued process of drafting
and revision is the primary work of this class, and is the main way your writing grows stronger. You will also write response papers to develop your ideas and reflect on the process of developing your ideas and questions.

- **Writing is a conversation.** When you write, you are participating in a conversation: with your immediate audience (represented by your classmates and me) and with a larger academic community. As you express your ideas in your written work, your audience will be responding to those ideas, telling you what their strengths are and where they can keep developing. In addition to the feedback you get from your classmates, you will have several individual conferences with me (these conferences are a required part of the course), and you will receive extensive written feedback from me throughout the semester.

**How the course works: writing and discussion**

This course consists of not only the work we do together in class, but also the individual questions, interests and strengths you bring to our work. We will focus on the goals particular to your own progress and work as a writer: developing your sense of what you already do well; challenging you to figure out how you want to grow as a writer; and expanding your repertoire of drafting and revision techniques.

One other important issue to note about your writing in this course:

- Just as in any Expos course, all of the work you do for this class is public—which means that it may be read by your fellow writers in the class (not just by me). If at any time you turn in a piece of writing that you would rather not have other students read, please tell me so—but also please note that you cannot make this request about every piece you turn in. Hearing the ideas and reactions of other readers is one of the most valuable opportunities a writer can have, and the writing that all students do in the course will often be the basis for our discussions.

**What you will write**

Expos 20 is organized around three units. Here’s how the writing will work in each:

- **Unit 1:** For this unit, you will write a brief argument (4 pages) consisting of close reading a single short story. The goal of this assignment is to focus on the most fundamental elements of argument: thesis, evidence, and reasoning.

- **Unit 2:** In this next unit, you will write a slightly longer (5-7 page) argument that puts a theoretical text (argument) into conversation with primary source material (your “exhibit;” here: photographs). The goal of this
assignment is to keep working on all of the skills noted above and practice articulating worthwhile arguments as you enter into dialogue with others. To this end, this unit will provide new challenges in terms of how you integrate sources and evidence.

- **Unit 3**: The argument you write in Unit 3 will be slightly longer (8-10 pages) and be based on a topic you select and research. The goal of this paper is to practice the skills and habits of mind necessary to identify a topic worthy of discussion and answer it in an original, interesting way that maintains your own voice all the while incorporating numerous others.

**What we'll do in class**

Expos is most effective when every student participates fully in the class; you learn much more from contributing your own ideas to our discussion than from simply listening to others do so. Our time together is largely devoted to discussion and small-group work. You are therefore responsible for being in class, prepared and on time, each time we meet.

- **Being prepared** means that you have given careful thought to the reading and writing assigned for the day, and that you are ready to offer ideas and questions to open our discussion. Have the required materials for that day with you. At least once in the semester, we will meet somewhere other than our usual classroom—it is your responsibility to note this and arrive promptly as always.

**To bring with you for all class meetings (in our classroom or elsewhere):**

- The readings for the day
- The course syllabus and the Unit assignment packet
- Your Expos notebook
- A pen or pencil, and highlighters in at least three different colors

- **Class discussions**: One of the best ways to develop your own ideas is to hear and respond to the ideas of others; articulating your response often helps you clarify what you want to convey. There will certainly be times this semester when we disagree with each other in our discussions. Our basic principle will always be to listen and respond to each other respectfully.

- **Laptop policy**: Unless the syllabus notes that you will need laptops for a particular class activity, there is a no laptop policy during our class discussions. The distractions of the Web, email, etc., are tempting, and we will want to channel our full attention into our discussions.

**Communication**
We’ll carry on our conversation about your writing outside of class as well. Please remember a few important things about keeping in touch:

- **Office Hours**: In addition to our conferences, you are of course free to come see me during office hours about your questions or developing ideas. If the scheduled office hours conflict with your schedule, please see me about setting up another time to meet.

- **E-mail**: Rather than take up our class time with announcements and administrative arrangements (and there will be many of them!), I use e-mail to communicate most of that information as well as other important things. As part of your participation in the course, **you will need to check your Harvard e-mail daily**; you are responsible for the information I send your way. Likewise, I will check mine once every weekday for questions from you (though please note that I don’t check it late at night—e-mail that reaches me after 7:00 p.m. will likely be answered the next day).

- **The course website**: We’ll use the course Canvas site in two important ways. All the assignments and most of the course handouts will be posted there, so you can always find that information if you misplace your printed copy; most course readings will be posted there too. The website is also a way to turn in your own written work, and to download sample writing that we’ll be using in class.

**Required texts and materials**

- Most course readings are available on our course website.
- The *Harvard Guide to Using Sources* ([http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu](http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu))
- A **single-subject notebook** that you will use only for this class. Please plan on bringing the notebook with you to each class, to our class meetings in other locations, and to your conferences.
- You will **print a lot for this course**, so be sure your printer cartridge or account is ready for that volume.

**COURSE POLICIES**

**Deadlines**

For each class meeting, you will prepare some reading or writing exercise to help you develop the argument for that unit. All essay deadlines in the course are firm, in order to make sure that you’re not falling behind on the frequent assignments and in order to be fair to each student. Our work together in class will also often be based on those assignments. For those reasons, it is imperative that you turn your work in on time.
I only grant extensions for medical or family emergencies. Essay drafts or revisions turned in after the deadline without an approved extension will be penalized a third of a letter-grade on the final essay for each day they are late. If you cannot meet a deadline due to a medical emergency, you must contact me right away, and a note from UHS may be required; in the event of a family emergency, you must contact me right away, and a note from your Resident Dean may be required. In those circumstances, we will also need to work out a schedule for you to make up your missed work.

Grades

The majority of your final grade comes from the final revised version of your written assignments. The remaining 10% of your grade represents the depth and seriousness of your unit 2 and 3 cover letters as well as your engaged and constructive participation in class discussion and conferences, the care with which you respond to fellow students’ work, and the presentations you prepare for class.

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Attendance and Lateness: Official Writing Program Policy

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. Please note the following Expos policies:

1. If you are absent without medical or religious excuse more than twice, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and failed. On your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your peril.

2. If you will miss or have missed a class, you are expected to let me know promptly; you remain responsible for the work due that day and for any new work assigned, and it is your job to follow up with a classmate to find out what you missed in class (i.e., it is not my job to tell you, though of course you can ask any specific questions you have). Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. For a medical excuse, you should contact me before class (or within 24 hours); you may also need to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Resident Dean.

3. Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, concerts, etc. are not excused 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. 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.

- Please note: class begins promptly at our specified meeting time. If you are
  more than ten minutes late for class more than twice, those latenesses will
  add up to a class absence.

Completion of Work: Official Writing Program Policy

Because this course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the
assigned essays to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of
the course (not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind). If
you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of an essay by the final due date in
that essay unit, you will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements. The
letter will specify the new date by which you must submit the late work. If you fail
to submit at least a substantial draft of the essay by this new date (unless you have
documented a medical problem), you are eligible to be officially excluded from the
course and given a failing grade.

Submission of Electronic Documents

You will submit most of your work for this course electronically to our course
Canvas site. As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to
ensure that you have saved the document in a form compatible with Microsoft
Word—all files must be in the format .doc or .docx. It is also your responsibility to
ensure that the file you send is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read
the file you have sent, the essay will be subject to a late penalty. Students
deliberately submitting corrupted files that are subject to disciplinary action.

Academic Integrity

All writers in an academic community (from professors to freshmen) are
developing their own ideas and interpretations, informed by the claims and
perspectives of others; all writers are responsible for helping their readers see the
distinction between their own ideas and the sources they draw on. In this class, we
will talk about and practice approaches to working well with sources, developing
your own ideas, and avoiding plagiarism or misuse of sources. Throughout the
semester we’ll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to
avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this
material. (Expos classes are great places for asking those questions!) All the work
that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make
use of outside sources unless that is explicitly part of the assignment. Any student
submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course, and is also potentially
eligible for disciplinary action by the Honor Council.

Collaboration
When people collaborate closely, as we will in this course, it is important to recognize the acceptable ways for working together. The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including workshop in class and feedback from Writing Center tutors). You will also collaborate with classmates on oral presentations or other class projects. If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your essay, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. If you are ever unsure about what constitutes acceptable collaboration in this course or how to acknowledge it, it is always wise to ask. All work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, drafts, or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden. (It is worth noting that courses in other fields may have different practices and policies about appropriate collaboration; when in doubt, always ask.)

**Writing Center**

At any stage of the writing process—brainstorming ideas, reviewing drafts, approaching revisions—you may want some extra attention to or feedback on your essays. The Writing Center (located on the ground level of the Barker Center,) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. I can't stress strongly enough how helpful those sessions can be; regardless of the "strength" or "weakness" of the essay, any piece of writing benefits from further review and a fresh perspective. Visit the Writing Center's web site at [writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu](http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu) to make an appointment. Tutors also hold drop-in office hours; see the website for locations.