



ENGLISH 290-A: LITERATURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

DR. KATE NESBIT
Sample Syllabus

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers an introduction to the various literatures of the Middle East and North Africa, a region comprised of approximately 22 countries, spanning from Morocco to Iran and encompassing the Maghreb and the Mashriq. Though there are many religions practiced and languages spoken in these countries (due in part to histories of imperial conquest and colonialism), Islam is the dominant religion in the region, and Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, is its *lingua franca*. Most of the texts we will read in this course will be read in translation from Arabic, though we will also read works translated from Hebrew, French, and Turkish.

In this course, we will focus on literature written in the 20th and 21st centuries, as a way to consider the influence of Western colonialism, globalization, and modernization on the region and its literature. Our first novel *My Name Is Red*, is written by the controversial Turkish writer and Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk—who attended the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. (Apparently, he liked to sleep until noon, write in the afternoon, and play ping pong in Mayflower Hall at night.) Pamuk's depiction of the tensions between “West” and “East”—tensions both cultural and political—become common threads in many of the books we will read, as authors like Mahmoud Darwish, Emile Habibi, Fatima Mernissi, and Zoya Pirzad grapple with the preservation of national and regional identities in an increasingly modern and global world. We close the semester studying literature of the Arab diaspora—Arab-American writers in particular—in the context of immigration policies and Islamophobia in the United States.

Throughout the semester we will also consider the politics and ethical complexities of studying literature from this region in the United States, where representations of Middle Eastern culture are often co-opted for the purposes of portraying Arab and Islamic culture as “backward” or “corrupt” in order to justify US intervention and cultural imperialism.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- ❖ Familiarize ourselves with the history, politics, culture, geography, and—of course—literature of the MENA region.
- ❖ Demonstrate and apply knowledge of literary terms and concepts, especially as they apply to the themes and formal characteristics of writing from the Greater Middle East.
- ❖ Consider the opportunities and challenges of translation, as well as reflect upon how these issues affect reception and reception history.
- ❖ Employ close reading strategies as a means to gain new insights into texts, as well as to compare and contrast different texts in both content and form.
- ❖ Research and reflect on how literary texts respond to and reflect broader historical and cultural contexts.

REQUIRED COURSE TEXTS



Orhan Pamuk, *My Name Is Red* (ISBN: 9780375706851)

Emile Habibi, *The Secret Life of Saeed, The Pessoptimist* (ISBN: 9781566564151)

Zoya Pirzad, *Things We Left Unsaid* (ISBN: 9781851689675)

Donia Maher, *The Apartment in Bab El-Louk* (ISBN: 9781850773061)

*There is also a required course pack that contains the syllabus's supplementary readings.

GRADING

Assignment	Percentage of Final Grade
<p><i>Quizzes and Invitations</i></p> <p>Occasional reading and content quizzes will be planned and announced. Daily reading invitations (meant to guide you through the day's reading and help you prepare for class discussion) will be collected at the beginning of each class period.</p>	25%
<p><i>Major Assignment #1: Resolve a Problem</i></p> <p>In this essay, we will focus on posing and resolving a key problem addressed in a literary text.</p>	20%
<p><i>Major Assignment #2: Close Read</i></p>	20%

In this essay, we will focus on employing close reading to learn more about a literary text and its cultural context.	
<i>Major Assignment #3: Research & Reflect</i> In this essay, we will practice placing a literary text in communication with outside research.	25%
<i>Attendance</i>	10%

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Defining “Engaged and Respectful Participation”

To be an engaged participant in our classroom requires you to be present, on time and engaged in the fullest sense. This may include listening actively and respectfully; asking questions; and making helpful, substantive contributions to in-class workshops, activities, and discussions. The best participants listen to their classmates, respond incisively to others’ comments in the room, and reflect or build upon classmates’ ideas.

There are no “off-limits” topics or opinions in this class. This means that we all bear the responsibility of maintaining a congenial classroom environment where every student feels comfortable voicing his or her ideas, convictions, insights, and contributions. Respectful communication in the classroom, then, necessitates particular attention to language, tone, and attitude.

Participation can take a number of forms. The most common form is verbal participation. However, I am aware that cultural and power differences may empower some students to speak more comfortably and more often than others. I try to incorporate opportunities for participation other than just verbal participation: journals, in-class activities, etc. Please contact me if there are other ways that I can help you become a successful and active participant in our classroom.

Attendance Policy

You need to be in class and on time every day. Absences cause you to miss out on instruction, learning time, and thinking opportunities. Assignments, directions, homework, and due dates will be updated in class and posted to Blackboard. It is your responsibility to know what these are, even if you miss a class. You are responsible for knowing the material and preparing any assigned work.

I take attendance daily. Any more than 3 unexcused absences (i.e., 4 +) will lead to a failing grade in the course. Illness, university team responsibilities, and other excused absences are permitted, but should be kept to an absolute minimum.

In the case of an excused absence, provide documentation of the absence and notify me, if at all possible, *before* the absence. You will not be able to make up a quiz or any other graded in-class activity (including paper workshops) if your absence is unexcused or if you fail to provide documentation.

COURSE POLICIES & EXPECTATIONS

Late Work

Unless other arrangements are made (this includes excused absences) **late work must be turned in within 3 days of the due date to receive any partial credit. When turned in after the due date and time but within 24 hours, the assignment will receive a grade reduced by a third of a letter grade.** The assignment will grade will be reduced by 1/3 of a letter grade for each additional day it is late until turned in. If the assignment is still not turned in three days after the due date and time, the assignment will receive a 0.

24/7 Policy for Discussing Graded Work

With regard to any assignment at any point in the semester, I am happy to speak with you about what you did well, how you could improve, and what you can work on for future assignments. In order to keep conversations relevant, constructive, and useful to you, please discuss graded assignments with me **no sooner than 24 hours** after the assignment is returned and **no later than 7 days** after return. I will gladly email with you to set aside office hour time or set up an appointment to talk in person.

Communication with Me

As the instructor of this course, I look forward to fostering and participating in an environment of respectful and thoughtful idea exchange. I also hope to be a resource for each of you as you develop your critical writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills, both in class and during one-on-one appointments during my office hours (or a pre-arranged meeting outside of my office hours, if necessary).

I strongly encourage students to make an appointment or stop by my office hours to ask for clarification on assignments, raise concerns or discomforts, request help on papers and speeches, or discuss any issue relevant (or irrelevant!) to this class. Attending my office hours shows commitment to this course and demonstrates accountability for your learning.

If, for any reason, you find it necessary to email me (regarding absences, time-sensitive questions, etc.), I will do my best to respond to your email within 24 hours during the weekdays and 48 hours during the weekends. If I do not respond within these parameters, resend the email.

Technology in the Classroom

As a general rule, I expect that you will turn off/silence and put away all of your electronic devices (cell phones, iPads, etc.) before class begins. This includes laptops and e-readers unless otherwise specified.

There are, of course, many reasonable exceptions to this general rule. If you do, for any reason, have a particular need for iPads, cell phones, or laptops during class time, please come talk to me during office hours.

There will also be class periods, activities, and peer review sessions for which I allow and often encourage technology use. I will notify you of these moments as they arise.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Subject to Change

Week One: Wednesday, August 28th – Friday, August 30th
W 8/28 Course Introduction
F 8/30 <i>Read:</i> Said, “Orientalism” [course pack]
Week Two: Monday, September 2 – Friday, September 6
M 9/2 Labor Day: No Class
W 9/4 <i>Read:</i> “Khosrow and Shirin” [course pack]
F 9/6 <i>View:</i> Ferdowsi’s miniatures from <i>Shahnameh</i> (c. 1000) [Blackboard] <i>Read:</i> Film critics on Kiarostami’s <i>Shirin</i> (2007) [Blackboard] <i>View:</i> Clips from <i>Shirin</i> [Blackboard]
Week Three: Monday, September 9th – Friday, September 13th
M 9/9 <i>Read:</i> Chapters 1-11, Orhan Pamuk, <i>My Name Is Red</i> , originally published in Turkish as <i>Benim Adım Kırmızı</i> (1998)
W 9/11 <i>Read:</i> Chapters 12-23, Pamuk, <i>My Name Is Red</i>
F 9/13 <i>Read:</i> Chapters 24-31, Pamuk, <i>My Name is Red</i>
Week Four: Monday, September 16 – Friday, September 20
M 9/16 <i>Read:</i> Chapters 32-40, Pamuk, <i>My Name is Red</i>
W 9/18 <i>Read:</i> Chapters 41-50, Pamuk, <i>My Name is Red</i>
F 9/20 <i>Read:</i> Chapters 51-54, Pamuk, <i>My Name is Red</i>
Week Five: Monday, September 23 – Friday, September 27
M 9/23 <i>Read:</i> Chapters 55-End, Pamuk, <i>My Name is Red</i>
W 9/25 <i>Read:</i> Updike, “Murder in Miniature” <i>Listen:</i> NPR, “Orhan Pamuk: Turkey’s Controversial Faulkner”

<p>F 9/27 Writing Workshop, Homework TBD</p>
<p>Week Six: Monday, September 30 – Friday, September 4th</p>
<p>M 9/30 <i>Watch:</i> The Palestine-Israel Conflict: A Brief History [Blackboard] <i>Read:</i> S. Yizhar, “The Prisoner”</p>
<p>W 10/2 <i>Read:</i> Poems by Mourid Barghouti, Mahmoud Darwish [Blackboard] <i>Listen:</i> Darwish, “We Travel Like All People,” in English and Arabic [Blackboard]</p> <p>Due: Essay #1</p>
<p>F 10/4 <i>Read:</i> Chapters 1-15, Emile Habibi, <i>The Secret Life of Saeed, The Pessoptimist</i></p>
<p>Week Seven: Monday, October 7th – Friday, October 11th</p>
<p><i>Read:</i> Chapters 16-30, Habibi, <i>The Secret Life</i></p>
<p><i>Read:</i> Chapters 31-End, Habibi, <i>The Secret Life</i></p>
<p><i>Read:</i> Poems by Fadwa Tuqan [Blackboard] <i>Read:</i> Spivak, “The Politics of Translation” [course pack]</p>
<p>Week Eight: Monday, October 14th – Friday, October 18th</p>
<p>M 10/14 Fall Break: No Class</p>
<p>W 10/16 <i>Read:</i> Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?” [Blackboard]</p>
<p>F 10/18 <i>Read:</i> Mernissi, Excerpts from <i>The Veil and the Male Elite</i> [course pack] <i>Read:</i> Ahmed, “The Veil Debate—Again” [course pack]</p>
<p>Week Nine: Monday, October 21st – Friday, October 25th</p>
<p>M 10/21 <i>Read:</i> Chapters 1-10, Zoya Pirzad, <i>Things We Left Unsaid</i></p>
<p>W 10/23 <i>Read:</i> Chapters 11-18, Pirzad, <i>Things We Left Unsaid</i></p>
<p>F 10/25 <i>Read:</i> Chapters 19-25, Pirzad, <i>Things We Left Unsaid</i></p>
<p>Week Ten: Monday, October 28th – Friday, November 1st</p>
<p>M 10/28</p>

<p><i>Read:</i> Chapters 26-33, Pirzad, <i>Things We Left Unsaid</i></p>
<p>W 10/30 <i>Read:</i> Chapters 34-41, Pirzad, <i>Things We Left Unsaid</i></p>
<p>F 11/1 <i>Read:</i> Chapters 41-End, Pirzad, <i>Things We Left Unsaid</i> <i>Watch and Read:</i> 1979 Islamic Revolution materials</p>
<p>Week Eleven: Monday, November 4th – Friday, November 8th</p>
<p>M 11/4 <i>Read:</i> Naguib Mahfouz, “A Murder Long Ago” [course pack] Due: Essay #2</p>
<p>W 11/6 <i>Read:</i> Yusuf Idris, “The Chair Carrier” [course pack]</p>
<p>F 11/8 <i>Listen:</i> Rose and Aziz, The Egyptian Revolution [Blackboard] <i>Read:</i> Elliot Cola, “The Poetry of Revolt,” in <i>Jadaliyya</i> [Blackboard] <i>Read:</i> Poetry of the Egyptian Revolution and the Arab Spring [Blackboard]</p>
<p>Week Twelve: Monday, November 11th - Friday, November 15th</p>
<p>M 11/11 <i>View/Read:</i> Arab Comix Material [Blackboard]</p>
<p>W 11/13 <i>Read:</i> McCloud, “The Vocabulary of Comics” [Blackboard] <i>View/Read:</i> Arab Comix, Dina Mohamed’s <i>Qahera</i> [Blackboard]</p>
<p>F 11/15 <i>View/Read:</i> 1-30, Donia Maher, <i>The Apartment in Bab El Louk</i></p>
<p>Week Thirteen: Monday, November 18th – Friday, November 22nd</p>
<p>M 11/18 <i>View/Read:</i> 30-60, Maher, <i>The Apartment in Bab El Louk</i></p>
<p>W 11/20 <i>View/Read:</i> 60-End, Maher, <i>The Apartment in Bab El Louk</i></p>
<p>F 11/22 <i>Listen:</i> The East is a Podcast episode In Class: Watch “Reel Bad Arabs”</p>
<p>Week Fourteen: Monday, November 25th – Friday, November 29th</p>
<p>M 11/25 In Class: Finish “Reel Bad Arabs”</p>

<p><u>W 11/27 and F 11/29</u> No Class: Thanksgiving Break</p>
<p>Week Fifteen: Monday, December 2nd – Friday, December 6th</p>
<p><u>M 12/2</u> <i>Read:</i> Refugee Narratives: Rasha Abbas [Blackboard]</p>
<p><u>W 12/ 4</u> <i>Read:</i> Refugee Narratives [Blackboard]</p>
<p><u>F 12/6</u> <i>Read:</i> Arab American writers Diana Abu-Jaber, “My Elizabeth” [Blackboard]</p>
<p>Week Sixteen: Monday, December 9th – Friday, December 13th</p>
<p><u>M 12/9</u> <i>Read:</i> Arab American Writers Selected Poetry: Hayan Charara, Fady Joudah, Naomi Shihab Nye</p>
<p><u>W 12/11</u> <i>Read:</i> Arab American Writers: Selected Poetry: Jess Rizkallah, Leila Chatti</p>
<p><u>F 12/13</u> Class Wrap-Up</p>
<p>Final Exam: Thursday, December 19th, 1:00 pm Due: Essay #3 Current Event Activity and Final Paper Turn-In</p>