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**WRTG596**

**The Literacy Narrative**

The literacy narrative is our first major writing assignment. This project is assigned during the first week of the semester, when nobody knows each other's names. The chances are that for twenty-five of us in the classroom it is our first time on a college campus. Chances are, twenty-five of us were never asked to write about ourselves in high school, and probably don’t know where to begin. I think of the literacy narrative as primarily a memoir, a site of written reflection upon our literate lives. Tracing how one becomes the reader and writer they are today is meaningful, yet is also a point of departure for all the details in the surround of a life. Like how a student, in tracing their relationship to writing, couldn’t not write about the death of their father, and how they had to live with their grandmother after his death, and how their personal response to trauma was in notebooks and journals. I remain faithful to the notion that writing and life are inextricable while guiding students toward their first literacy narrative. Memoir, or “intense life writing,” at the start of a 14-week semester serves to create a space for students tofeel OK writing about themselves. bell hooks writes, “Hearing each other’s voices, individual thoughts, and sometimes associating these voices with personal experience makes us more acutely aware of each other” (1994). The literacy narrative is thus an impetus for vulnerability and empathy, prerequisites for a collaborative composition classroom, wherein it’s necessary for me to know my students, for my students to know me, and for us to know each other. Furthermore, it serves the composition curriculum by introducing students to memory-work; multimodal design (students are asked to incorporate a “memorious artifact” in their work, such as an image, a photocopy of a meaningful object, or a hyperlink to a song or other digital media); and literacy as a concept informed by “contact zones” (1991): radically contingent and unique, yet equally valid, personal-cultural disposition to language use. Students read an autoethnographic tale of a middle-class academic who lives in Ann Arbor, and her friend, a working-poor immigrant who lives in Detroit, to illustrate differing literacies, and the problems one encounters when telling their story to someone else (1996). Following the literacy narrative, we go digital in the next major assignment; yet students are given the option to “remix” their hard-earned memoirs on Twitter, opening up the space for multimodal transformation for the first time.

Behar, R. (1996). My Mexican Friend Marta Who Lives in Detroit.

*The Vulnerable Observer* (90-103). Beacon Press.

hooks, b. (1994). Confronting Class in the Classroom.

*Teaching to Transgress* (177-189). Rutledge.

Pratt, M. L. (1991). Arts of the Contact Zone.

*Profession,* 33-40.

**project one: literacy narrative**

**Logistics:**

* 4-6 pages (Double spaced, legible font)
* Rough draft due in-class Thursday 9/21 for peer-review (2pp.)
* 2nd rough draft due in-class Tuesday 9/26 for workshop (4pp.)
* Final draft (and Portfolio) due Thursday 9/28 (4-6pp.)

**Overview:**

Your literacy narrative will capture a series of moments & memories, experiences, artifacts, and influences from your personal history and connect them to how they inform your relationship to reading and writing, and thus your self. Your narrative will reflect your personal desires, creative impulses, and individual & shared experience, taking the shape of a unique written form.

Imagine a collection of snapshots or vignettes, documenting significant moments in your life that impact who you are today. Your literacy narrative can include as material other than plain text, but is not limited to, song lyrics, family photographs, social media artifacts, text message samples, and so forth, to highlight the everyday use of language and meaning-making we are always participant in.

**Weaving Concepts in your Writing:**

* Your literacy narrative should be a text woven through multiple writing attempts—that is to say, it is not something that will be written last minute. Through responding to readings in class and free-writing, much of the material you will use to craft your literacy narrative will have already been created. Your literacy narrative much show evidence of a process-driven engagement with writing. Although there is space to create a multi-media piece, this first project will largely be an analog one—that is, written by hand.
* Throughout the semester we will be discussing "literacy" and its various meanings w/in shifting cultural and social contexts. For this introductory assignment, you will be drawing on your own personal insights into your own past experiences that have shaped you as a "literate" being. This requires you to do serious *memory work*—thinking hard about key moments in your education, formal or informal, throughout *your life*, that have shaped who you are today and how you currently experience the world. I want to see a link between your understanding of your self and your experience as a user of language in the world within the many shifting social and cultural contexts our "I's" inhabit.
* In addition, your writing must incorporate at least one "memorial artifact." This could be a snippet from a family photo album, song lyrics whose meaning resonates deeply with you, or an actual material object (like a seashell, or a childhood drawing) that helps us *feel* the memories you are trying to invoke.