

FSP101: Storytellers & Survivors, Fall 2013

Prof. Harriet Hustis, Office: Bliss 201 Email: hustis@tcnj.edu

Office hours: Tuesdays, 3:00-5:30, Wednesdays, 4:30-5:30 or by appointment

The Freshman Seminar Program (FSP) is designed to offer incoming students an introduction to college academics. Specifically, the goals of the Freshman Seminar Program are:

- To foster intellectual curiosity
- To introduce students to college-level assignments and college-level expectations in terms of writing, reading, research, and oral presentations
- To improve the ability to think critically
- To foster a culture of intellectual engagement outside the classroom,
- To encourage greater responsibility for one's own learning;
- To introduce the concept of a well-rounded education based on a breadth of knowledge that goes beyond one's immediate professional or academic field

Required Texts:

Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace* (1996)

Jon Krakauer, *Into Thin Air* (1997)

John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (1946)

Alice Sebold, *Lucky* (1999)

Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*

Nuha Al-radi, *Baghdad Diaries* (1998)

Jean-Dominique Bauby, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (1997)

Lucy Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face* (1994)

Susanna Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted* (1993)

Please make sure that you have completed the assigned reading by the start of each class. There will be approximately 100 pages of reading per week: in a couple of cases, there may be slightly more. While much of the reading is engaging, some of it may be very disturbing or upsetting. If you feel this isn't something you can handle on a regular basis, you should drop the course during the add/drop period. Do not come to class and complain that the reading material is "depressing." It sure is. We all know that already: that's not the point.

That said, to avoid feeling overwhelmed and depressed by the subject matter, you might consider doing the assigned reading in small increments—20-25 pages a day—instead of trying to read it all at once, in an afternoon or evening.

You will be expected to read, not simply to learn "what happened," but to reflect on how each writer chooses to describe or narrate his or her experience of "what happened." As you read, pay attention to language: word choice, descriptions, dialogue, characterization. If you notice that there are things the author *doesn't* say, make a note of that and think about what might be left out, and why.

You will be graded on the basis of the following components of your course performance:

3 Analytical Essays: worth 60% of the final grade (20% each)

Over the course of the semester, you will submit three, 5-page papers. Topics are listed at the end of the syllabus and due dates are indicated on the syllabus. **ALL PAPERS SHOULD BE SUBMITTED BY THE START OF CLASS ON THE ASSIGNED DUE DATE** (or by the date & time indicated) and they must be submitted to Canvas. I will not be collecting hard-copies of any of your written work for this course: all materials should be submitted to Canvas.

No late papers will be accepted: no exceptions!

Papers should represent your best work: they should be articulate, thoughtful and well-organized. If you are uncertain what is expected of you, please do not hesitate to arrange to meet with me prior to the due date. I will not read rough drafts, but I will discuss your ideas with you and look at any thesis statement or opening paragraph you develop.

If you receive a grade of C- or lower on a paper, you may revise and resubmit it, but **you may only do this once during the semester**. The first and second grades will be combined to determine the average grade: this will be the “final” grade for that assignment. So, if you receive a C- on the first submission and an A on the second, your final grade will be a B/B- ($70 + 95 = 165$, divided by $2 = 82.5$).

If you would like to revise a paper, you must choose that option within a week of the date on which papers are returned and you must notify me via email that you will be revising and resubmitting your essay. (Papers will be returned to Canvas: I will use MS Word’s Track Changes option to offer comments and suggestions.)

A revised essay must be resubmitted to Canvas no later than 3 weeks after the original, graded essay is returned.

Final Paper: worth 20% of the final grade

Your final paper will be a reflective essay, designed to offer a culminating experience of what you’ve learned in the course about issues of narrative, identity, storytelling, trauma, and survival.

The topic for the final paper will be distributed during the last class, on Dec. 4th. It will be due no later than the scheduled final exam date for the course and it must be submitted to Canvas. (There will not be an in-class final exam during finals week for this course.)

You **MAY NOT** consult with others for this final assignment. As for all of the assignments in the course, you are expected to **do your own work at all times**. Failure to do so will result in a failing grade for the assignment and will be reported as a violation of the College’s Academic Integrity Policy (see below).

TCNJ’s Final Exam Policy is available here: <http://recreg.pages.tcnj.edu/269-2/>

Class Participation: worth 20% of the final grade

Students can earn 100 points for class participation. At the end of the semester, the available 100 points is divided by the number of class sessions (typically 14) to determine how much each class is worth. So, if class meets 14 times during the semester, each class session is worth 7 points.

It is not hard to earn 7 points over the course of a 3-hr class. You cannot earn those points, however, if it is clear that you have not done the reading or if you are absent, asleep or otherwise occupied (checking a cell phone, playing cards on your laptop, whatever).

Every student is expected to participate in each of his/her courses through regular attendance. It is further expected that every student will be present, on time, and prepared to participate when scheduled class sessions begin. While attendance itself is not used as a criterion for academic evaluation, a portion of the course grade is based on participation in class discussion and activities which may take place during class sessions.

Students who must miss classes due to participation in a field trip, athletic event, or other official college function should arrange with their instructors for such class absences well in advance. In every instance, the student has the responsibility to initiate arrangements for make-up work.

Students are expected to attend class and complete assignments as scheduled, to avoid outside conflicts (if possible), and to enroll only in those classes that they can expect to attend on a regular basis. Absences caused by illness, injury, death in the family, observance of religious holidays, and similarly compelling personal reasons including physical disabilities should be discussed with the professor as soon as possible (i.e., do not contact me during the last week of class and try to arrange to make up six weeks' worth of work after the fact). It is the student's responsibility to ask for and arrange any opportunities to make up missed work: these requests and arrangements must be made at (or around) the time of the absence.

For lengthy absences, make-up opportunities might not be feasible and are at the discretion of the instructor. Students have the responsibility of notifying instructors in advance of expected absences. In cases of absence for a week or more, students are to notify their instructors immediately. If they are unable to do so they may contact the Office of Records and Registration. The Office of Records and Registration will notify the instructor of the student's absence. The notification is not an excuse but simply a service provided by the Office of Records and Registration. Notifications cannot be acted upon if received after an absence. In every instance the student has the responsibility to initiate arrangements for make-up work. TCNJ's attendance policy is available on the web: <http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=8162>

Academic Integrity Policy: Academic dishonesty is any attempt by the student to gain academic advantage through dishonest means, to submit, as his or her own, work which has not been done by him/her or to give improper aid to another student in the completion of an assignment. Such dishonesty would include, but is not limited to: submitting as his/her own a project, paper, report, test, or speech copied from, partially copied, or paraphrased from the work of another (whether the source is printed, under copyright, or in manuscript form). Credit must

be given for words quoted or paraphrased. The rules apply to any academic dishonesty, whether the work is graded or ungraded, group or individual, written or oral.

You are expected to do your own work. Submitting work with incorrect or sloppy citations or presenting ideas that you know that you did not write or create on your own is considered plagiarism. TCNJ's academic integrity policy is available on the web:

<http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=7642>

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy: Any student who has a documented disability and is in need of academic accommodations should notify the professor of this course and contact the Office of Differing Abilities Services (609-771-2571). Accommodations are individualized and in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992. TCNJ's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy is available on the web: <http://affirm.pages.tcnj.edu/key-documents/>

Grading Scale:

94-100 A
90-93 A-
87-89 B+
84-86 B
80-83 B-
77-79 C+
74-76 C
70-73 C-
67-69 D+
64-66 D
60-63 D-
59 and below F

You might also want to consult my "Grading Guide for Written Assignments" available at: http://hustis.intrasun.tcnj.edu/grading_guide.html

Please note: You are **not** expected to incorporate outside research for any of the assignments for this course.

Throughout the semester, you will be expected to engage in "close readings" of the assigned texts, both during your in-class participation and on your written assignments. If you are uncertain what a "close reading" is or whether you are doing it correctly, please ASK! You can ask in class or you can contact me via email or during my office hours.

Here are several websites that offer definitions and advice regarding the practice of "close readings" of literature:

http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/reading_lit.html

<http://uwc.utexas.edu/handouts/close-reading>

<http://www.cgu.edu/pages/918.asp>

Syllabus

Wednesday, Aug. 28th:

Course expectations and requirements

Discuss: selections from Hockenberry *Moving Violations* and The Bible: Book of Job (to be distributed in class).

Wednesday, Sept. 4th: Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*: you only need to read pp. 3-113!

Wednesday, Sept. 11th: Alice Sebold, *Lucky*, chapters 1-8 (pp. 5-131)

****Trigger Warning:** The first 10-12 pages of this text contain a disturbing and graphic description of Sebold's rape. Due to the sensitive nature of this content, I will not ask or expect you to read it, if you feel that you cannot or should not. We will not discuss any of the specifics of this scene in class. Obviously, Sebold's storytelling tactics and use of language are worthy of analysis: if you choose to do so, you may analyze this scene in one of your essays or stop by during my office hours if you'd like to discuss this scene from a literary/storytelling perspective.

Wednesday, Sept. 18th: Sebold, *Lucky*, chapters 9-end (pp. 132-243)

Wednesday, Sept. 25th: Hersey, *Hiroshima* (entire text)

Wednesday, Oct. 2nd: Al-radi, *Baghdad Diaries*, "Embargo" (pp. 61-131) **Paper #1 due in Canvas**

Wednesday, Oct. 9th: Al-radi, *Baghdad Diaries*, "Exile," "Identity," "Postscript" (pp. 132-217)

Wednesday, Oct. 16th: Krakauer, *Into Thin Air*

Wednesday, Oct. 23rd: Krakauer, *Into Thin Air*

Wednesday, Oct. 30th: Atwood, *Alias Grace*; **Paper #2 due in Canvas**

Wednesday, Nov. 6th: Atwood, *Alias Grace*

Wednesday, Nov. 13th: Bauby, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (please read the entire text before the start of class)

Wednesday, Nov. 20th: Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face* (please read the entire text before the start of class)

Paper #3 due in Canvas by 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 26th

Wednesday, Dec. 4th: Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted* (please read the entire text before the start of class); Final exam topic distributed: due in Canvas by the end-time of the scheduled final exam

Paper Topics

The following are the paper topics for the course. You may choose any one you'd like, but once you have used a topic, you may not use it again for another paper—you'll have to use one of the others. (Note: There are only three paper assignments, but four topics.)

You may only use each text once. (So, if you use *Lucky* for your first essay, you cannot use it again for another essay.) You may, however, use any text you like for the final paper, but you must use at least one text that you haven't used on any of your other essays.

Papers should be 5 pages long, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins on all sides. Please use 12-pt. font and follow MLA Citation format: put page numbers for citations in parentheses after the quotation. If you are only using the assigned course texts, there is no need to include a Works Cited page. If you are using different editions of the text, you should include a Works Cited page. If you are using electronic copies of the texts and page numbers are not indicated, try to give chapter numbers as a point of reference.

For all of these topics: you need to be focused and specific. **Do not** summarize the plot; **do not** describe "what happens."

- Formulate a specific thesis. What will your essay argue, and why is that important? Don't simply reiterate the topic. For example, your thesis should not be, "For many survivors who attempt to tell their stories, there is a clear sense of a "before" and an "after.""
- Choose a specific scene or two, and drill down on it: what kind of language and imagery does the author use, and why? What effect does this create, and how does this work to support the overarching argument that you are making?
- Don't try to do too much: you can't cover everything in 5 pages. A close, focused analysis of how a particular scene "works" is better than 5 pages of broad generalities.

Before & After: In *Lucky*, at the end of chapter 2, Sebold writes, "My life was over; my life had just begun" (33). For many survivors who attempt to tell their stories, there is a clear sense of a "before" and an "after." Choose one or (at most) two texts, and focus on comparing and contrasting the way in which a sense of "before" and "after" is created and communicated. Questions you might consider: is "before" and "after" simply chronological, or is it something emotional, spiritual, physical? How does the language and imagery work to create this effect, and why? What role does the traumatic event seem to play as a "dividing line"? Is it a clear-cut moment or is it something more all-encompassing?

Self & Other: How do writers conceive of themselves and their relationship to others, both as they are surviving and as they are retelling the story of their survival? Choose one or (at most) two texts, and focus on comparing and contrasting the way in which "self" and "other" are constructed. Questions you might consider: do "others" help or hurt the writer's sense of "self"? Does this change after the traumatic event? How does a particular writer attempt to understand him/herself in the wake of the trauma that s/he has experienced? Pay attention to language, imagery, and the kind of issues the writer raises.

Reliability and Unreliability: In *Into Thin Air*, Jon Krakauer admits, “The staggering unreliability of the human mind at high altitude made the research problematic” (xvi). Many of the writers we are reading testify to their own unreliability: the traumas they undergo are physically and emotionally overwhelming. Choose one or (at most) two texts, and focus on comparing and contrasting how the writers you have chosen grapple with the issue of their (un)reliability. Questions you might consider: what does the writer do when s/he encounters points at which s/he simply doesn’t know what happened? How are those moments represented in the text? How does a writer attempt to “fill in the gaps”? When and why does the writer assert what s/he knows? Why might those moments be particularly crucial for him/her?

Hope: Almost invariably and inevitably, stories of survival focus on the question of hope—both during a traumatic event and in its aftermath. Choose one or (at most) two texts, and focus on comparing and contrasting how the issue of hope is addressed. Does the writer confront it openly and directly, or is a sense of hope communicated indirectly (implied)? What effect might either strategy have on the overall perception of the trauma that the writer endured and the subsequent story that s/he tells? Pay attention to language, dialogue, imagery: how might these elements work to fuel the narrative as a “hopeful” story? Does the writer acknowledge losing hope (whether during the event or afterward)? When and why? Again, why might this be significant in terms of how s/he tells a story of survival?