

Literature and Medicine
ENG 4371 – Fall 2019

Instructor

Dr. Woods Nash

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I welcome questions and comments by email. If you email me from Monday to Thursday, I will reply within 24 hours. If you email me on Friday or over the weekend, I will reply on Monday, at the latest. But if you email me about an assignment that is due within 24 hours, do not expect a reply. You should begin assignments, and ask questions, much further in advance of the due date. All assignments will be discussed in class and instructions will be posted on Blackboard.

Course Description

We will consider how contemporary medicine, illness, and disability have been portrayed in a variety of genres, especially fiction, memoir, and movies since the 1980s. As we explore depictions of healthcare professionals and of persons apparently ill, we will pay careful attention to their form, style, and uses of perspective. Culturally, what forces have shaped these portrayals of doctors and patients, and how do these works influence our own expectations of medicine? Our overarching theme will be alienation: a condition of persons who, through experiences medical or otherwise, become strange to themselves, others, or both.

Required Texts

Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985)

Katherine Dunn, *Geek Love* (1989)

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

Bob Hicok, *Hold* (2018)

Christie Watson, *The Language of Kindness* (2019)

*Paper copies are required for all texts. Other readings and materials will be posted on the course Blackboard site or distributed by email. Students will be expected to rent/buy additional resources, such as movies.

Grade

Your final grade will be derived from four areas of your work.

1. Participation - 100 points

You are expected to participate *frequently* (i.e., almost every class) in our discussions of readings and other assignments. If you miss an opportunity to participate in class, you may earn credit by emailing me your thoughts on the day's reading within one week of that class session.

Also, to earn full credit, you *must* participate in 2 Round Table discussions. I encourage you to bring something to share for one of them. Those sessions are always on Tuesdays at noon in the Honors Commons. See your course schedule.

You *must* also attend the play *Wit* (Sept 12), the Watson reading (Oct 7), and **two of the following events** listed in your course schedule: Art of Observation (Sept 19), Off Script storytelling event (Nov 14), and Medflix movie night (Nov 21).

Conflicts: if a prior commitment will prevent you from attending any of these required events, you must email me by Sept 4 to discuss a makeup assignment. For each Round Table or other event missed, you will lose 10 points on your participation grade.

2. Reading Quizzes - 100 points

There will be 12 pop quizzes on assigned readings, and you can earn up to 10 points on each quiz. So it is possible to earn more than 100 points toward your quiz grade. Points in excess of 100 will be added to your overall point total for the course.

Quizzes missed due to non-excused absences cannot be taken at another time. Students will receive no credit for a quiz with no name on it.

3. Reflection Papers - 100 points

There will be 4 of these throughout the semester. They are worth up to 25 points each. Specific instructions for each reflection paper will be given later.

*If something prevents you from submitting a reflection paper on Blackboard, you may still receive credit by emailing the paper to me, but only if it is submitted *on time*.

4. Long Papers - 100 points

Of the four required texts for this course (two novels and two memoirs), **you must choose one novel and one memoir** to write about. These two papers are worth up to 50 points each. You may not write more than two of these papers (e.g., to replace a grade you do not like). Additional instructions will be given later.

*Long papers should be submitted through Blackboard. However, if something prevents you from submitting your paper on Blackboard, you may still receive credit by emailing the paper to me *on time*.

Grading Scale

93-100% (372 – 400 points) = A
90-92% (360 – 371) = A-
87-89% (348 – 359) = B+
83-86% (332 – 347) = B
80-82% (320 – 331) = B-
77-79% (308 – 319) = C+
73-76% (292 – 307) = C
70-72% (280 – 291) = C-
67-69% (268 – 279) = D+
63-66% (252 – 267) = D
60-62% (240 – 251) = D-
0-59% (0 – 239) = F

Attendance and Absences

Each student is allowed **three non-excused absences**, which I advise you to reserve for illness, medical visits, and other unforeseen events. Non-excused absences do not necessarily hurt your participation grade because you may still earn participation credit by email. However, after three non-excused absences, you will lose 10 points for each additional non-excused absence.

Every student has the opportunity for **three excused absences** due to religious observances, university commitments (including travel), or any other event or commitment. You must notify me of these absences by the Official Reporting Day (Sept 4). Failure to notify me of any absence by the ORD means that I might not excuse it. If you anticipate missing more than five class sessions in total, I suggest you drop the course. Excused absences for other things (e.g., hospital stays) will be granted at my discretion.

Accommodations for each excused absence will include any of the following that are relevant to the class sessions missed: an opportunity to earn participation credit by email, an opportunity to take a missed quiz, and an extension on a due date for a paper (but only if that paper is due soon after the date of the class missed).

Late Assignments

Failure to submit an assignment on time will result in no credit for that assignment. The only exception is a documented emergency (e.g., illness, car accident) that is so severe that it prevents you from submitting the paper in class or by email. If you experience such an emergency, I expect you to email me as soon as possible to explain your situation, and I will assign you a new due date. You must also provide documentation of your emergency on the first day that you return to class.

Classroom Conduct

During class, you may not use computers, phones, or any other electronic devices without my permission. Sleeping, texting, reading materials unrelated to class, and doing work for other classes are also forbidden. Avoid talking with your classmates unless your discussion is part of a class/group discussion. All of these behaviors distract me and your classmates, reducing the quality of our classroom experience. Each time you violate this policy, you will not be eligible for participation credit for that class session. If you violate this policy repeatedly, expect to be asked to leave the class and to receive an additional deduction from your participation grade.

Accessibility

I will work with the Center for Students with DisABILITIES (CSD) to accommodate "students who have temporary or permanent health impairments, physical limitations, psychiatric disorders, and/or learning disabilities." If you have documentation from the CSD, please share it with me. If you think you might need accommodation, please follow the steps outlined on the CSD website (www.uh.edu/csd/), and the CSD will recommend ways for me to accommodate you.

UH CAPS Statement

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS (www.uh.edu/caps) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the "Let's Talk" program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html

Academic Honesty

See UH's policy on academic honesty at www.uh.edu/provost/policies/honesty/.

Course Schedule

* = events in the Medicine and the Arts series. You must attend 2 Round Tables and 2 of the following events: Art of Observation (Sept 19; must RSVP on series website), Off Script storytelling event (Nov 14), and Medflix movie night (Nov 21).

Tuesday August 20 – Intro to the course; Tony Hoagland, "Hope"

Thursday August 22 – Andrew Slater, "New Me" (Blackboard)

Tuesday August 27 – Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1-53)

Thursday August 29 – Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (54-104)

Tuesday September 3 – Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (107-156); Reflection Paper 1 (instructions)

*Round Table discussion, 12-12:45 p.m., Honors Commons – This is a highbrow show-and-tell. Please consider sharing a work of art (e.g., poem, painting, photo, podcast, video) related to health, medicine, illness, or disability. For literary excerpts, bring ~12 copies.

Wednesday September 4 – Official Reporting Day. This is the last day to email Dr. Nash about the dates of your excused absences and about conflicts that prevent you from attending required events (see participation requirements in syllabus).

Thursday September 5 – Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (159-208)

Sunday Sept 8 – Reflection Paper 1 (due on Blackboard)

Tuesday September 10 – Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (209-258); Reflection Paper 2 (instructions)

Thursday September 12 – 7:30 p.m., Wit, MATCH (3400 Main Street)

Sunday September 15 – Reflection Paper 2 (due on Blackboard)

Tuesday September 17 – Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (259-310); Long Paper 1 (instructions)

*Round Table discussion, 12-12:45 p.m., Honors Commons – This is a highbrow show-and-tell. Please consider sharing a work of art (e.g., poem, painting, photo, podcast, video) related to health, medicine, illness, or disability. For literary excerpts, bring ~12 copies.

Thursday September 19 – Christie Watson, *The Language of Kindness* (Intro, chapters 1-2)

*Art of Observation, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 5:30-7 p.m. - Led by Dr. Kelley Magill (University Programs Specialist at the MFAH), this foray in the exhibit space helps students, as she puts it, “hone their observation skills, practice accurate description, develop empathetic communication, and explore how emotions and bias can affect objective observations.”

Meet at the MFAH in the lobby of the Beck Building. The event is free, but space is limited to 15 students. **To attend, you must RSVP on the series website.**

Sunday September 22 – Long Paper 1 (due on Blackboard)

Tuesday September 24 – Watson, *The Language of Kindness* (chapters 3-4)

Thursday September 26 – Watson, *The Language of Kindness* (chapters 5-7)

Tuesday October 1 – Watson, *The Language of Kindness* (8-10); Long Paper 2 (instructions)

*Round Table discussion, 12-12:45 p.m., Honors Commons – This is a highbrow show-and-tell. Please consider sharing a work of art (e.g., poem, painting, photo, podcast, video) related to health, medicine, illness, or disability. For literary excerpts, bring ~12 copies.

Thursday October 3 – Watson, *The Language of Kindness* (11-13)

Sunday October 6 – Long Paper 2 (due on Blackboard)

*Monday October 7 – Christie Watson, 6-8 p.m., The Health Museum

Watson, a British writer and retired nurse, will discuss and read from her memoir, *The Language of Kindness: A Nurse's Story*. Her memoir was named one of the Best Books of 2018 by *The Guardian* and *The Sunday Times*. Her first novel, *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, won the 2011 Costa Award. With UH, this event is co-sponsored by Rice University, Baylor College of Medicine, and McGovern Medical School.

Tuesday October 8 – No Class (attendance required at Watson reading on Oct 7)

Thursday October 10 – Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.* (excerpt on Blackboard)

Tuesday October 15 – Katherine Dunn, *Geek Love* (chapters 1-5)

*Round Table discussion, 12-12:45 p.m., Honors Commons – This is a highbrow show-and-tell. Please consider sharing a work of art (e.g., poem, painting, photo, podcast, video) related to health, medicine, illness, or disability. For literary excerpts, bring ~12 copies.

Thursday October 17 – Dunn, *Geek Love* (chapters 6-10)

Tuesday October 22 – Dunn, *Geek Love* (chapters 11-14); Reflection Paper 3 (instructions)

Thursday October 24 – Dunn, *Geek Love* (chapters 15-19)

Sunday October 27 – Reflection Paper 3 (due on Blackboard)

Tuesday October 29 – Dunn, *Geek Love* (chapters 20-23); Long Paper 3 (instructions)

*Round Table discussion, 12-12:45 p.m., Honors Commons – This is a highbrow show-and-tell. Please consider sharing a work of art (e.g., poem, painting, photo, podcast, video) related to health, medicine, illness, or disability. For literary excerpts, bring ~12 copies.

Thursday October 31 – Dunn, *Geek Love* (chapters 24-28)

Sunday November 3 – Long Paper 3 (due on Blackboard)

Tuesday November 5 – Black Mirror, Be Right Back (in class)

Thursday November 7 – Rosemarie Garland Thompson, TBA

Tuesday November 12 – Lucy Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face* (Prologue, Chapters 1-3);
Reflection Paper 4 (instructions)

*Round Table discussion, 12-12:45 p.m., Honors Commons – This is a highbrow show-and-tell. Please consider sharing a work of art (e.g., poem, painting, photo, podcast, video) related to health, medicine, illness, or disability. For literary excerpts, bring ~12 copies.

Thursday November 14 – Lucy Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face* (Chapters 4-6)

*Off Script: Stories from the Heart of Medicine, 5:30-6:30 p.m., McGovern Medical School, room TBA – The Texas Medical Center’s storytelling hour, a collaboration between UH, Baylor College of Medicine, and McGovern Medical School. To submit a story, visit the Off Script website.

Sunday November 17 – Reflection Paper 4 (due on Blackboard)

Tuesday November 19 – Lucy Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face* (Chapters 7-9);
Long Paper 4 (instructions)

Thursday November 21 – Lucy Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face* (Chapters 10-12)

*Medflix Movie Night, 6 p.m., Nocturnal Animals (2016), Honors Commons – Pizza and other refreshments will be served.

Sunday November 24 – Long Paper 4 (due on Blackboard)

Tuesday November 26 – No Class

Thursday November 28 – No Class