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College of Liberal Arts and Sciences_ENG 381 Frontiers of the Land and Mind_COVID Related Course Activities

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To: Tim Cole, Associate Dean of CLAS
Jeff St. John, Senior Provost Associate
From: Laura Cowan
Re: COVID-19-related course activities for Spring 2020
June 2, 2020

I taught an English literature course at the 300-level, ENG 381: Frontiers of the Land and the Mind during Spring 2020. We read books which featured literal and metaphorical frontiers, borders, boundaries, and margins. The course had three sections: 1) American Western Frontier; 2) International borders in books on Imperialism, Colonialism, and Refugees; 3) Environmental ecotones in nature and their importance to environmental sustainability.

Students gave oral presentations on borders, margins, or bridges of their own choosing. Several students gave presentations about our Coronavirus Pandemic and their experiences in it as a historical boundary between eras. Others compared the trauma of the pandemic to the trauma of exiles and refugees in some of the works we read. Others used theories of liminality and also theories around rites of passages or also the stages of grief to analyze their experience of the pandemic.

The description of the assignment is attached to this document.

Assignment: Student Oral Demonstration on Borders, Margins, Bridges, Walls, Frontiers

Sign Up for your topic and due date for Oral Demonstrations on April 3 & April 4

Demonstrations due on April 9, April 14, April 17, 21

Background: We have spent the semester looking at different kinds of "frontiers" and the consequences of the "frontier condition."

We have looked at physical boundaries:

- walls as in "Mending Wall" that mark a boundary between two properties (apple tree owner vs. pine trees owner),
- doors that separate rooms in a house,
- frontiers that mark two parts of one country (American frontier that marked territory between "civilization" or "settled land" and "wilderness" or "wild land")
- borders between different countries (Bosnia and Croatia, for example or Austria and Hungary)

We have discussed liminal or marginal "conditions" on the social, political, or psychological level and the challenges and opportunities of living on borders. We talked about "liminal conditions" which are physical, social, psychological, or spiritual: conditions of transition. Victor Turner argues that when a society, a person, or a landscape is going through "transition," it needs a "rite of passage" to help ritualize and make meaning of the border, boundary, or bridge. As Zibiah Dartt explained, many cultures and religions create a "rite of passage" for adolescents at about age 13 that helps them cope with the move from childhood to adulthood. We have many ceremonies to celebrate the transition from one season to the next. One could argue that Captain Forrester lacked a ritual or rite to help him move from the "Old West" to the "New West." You could argue that Ivy rejected a bridge from the Old West to the New West, while Niel used his friendship with the Captain and the ideals that the Captain modelled and instilled in Niel to help him transition from the Old West to the New West.

Cultural boundaries, borders, and bridges have featured importantly in our discussions. Amy in the film *High Noon* comes from an East Coast Quaker culture that seems much different from her husband's Western culture. At first she cannot understand him because of their cultural differences, but the crisis of Miller arriving on the noon train helps them change and they grow to understand each other. Preeti and Deepak have different cultural traditions that they do not seem to be able to bridge or transcend. Mary Louise Pratt looks at the cultural situation when a dominant culture conquers or imposes upon a subordinate culture. Instead of domination and subordination, she offers a model of cultural exchange or interchange where cultures interact to understand their common humanity or to form a new dynamic culture. Would Preeti and

Deepak have benefited from Pratt's contact of the "contact zone" which encourages transformation through exchange?

Directions:

1. Choose a frontier, border, boundary, bridge or wall of any sort. It can be geographical, physical, social, political, or psychological. It can be "real" such as the Mexico/U.S. border or it can be make-believe such as the wardrobe in C. S. Lewis's *The Lion and the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Or the tollbooth in *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster. Or the gate to hell in Dante's *Inferno*. It can be historical or scientific. It can exist in a work of literature or painting or music or film.
2. Name and define your chosen object. To name it would be to say "the wall in the poem 'Mending Wall.'" To define it would be to say, "The mending wall is a 'barrier' or an 'obstacle.' Something that prevents movement from one area to the other."
3. Analyze the traits of the "frontier" you have chosen. "Sunsweep" by David Barr, for example, is a series of three sculptures made from one stone and situated at three borders. Barr claims that "Borders are equivocal things. They separate people, mark a clear delineation of responsibility. Yet they mark a connection, a shared interest." Barr analyzes some of the challenges posed by borders and he defines the purpose of his work of art, whose features are meant to be "a symbol of international friendship."
4. Why? Who cares? So what? Purpose? Explain the "significance" of this frontier. This would include why you have chosen it as your "model" frontier. Does it pose the problems or challenges of walls and boundaries? Does it solve the problem? Does it celebrate the virtues of walls and boundaries? Does your evaluation of its features depend upon circumstance?

Guidelines:

- Choose a subject you care about
- Have an "original" title for your project
- Your presentation should be 10-15 minutes long
- You can choose any format you like that can be posted in our Media Gallery in our ENG 381 Blackboard Classroom. You can voice over a power point or take a video of yourself lecturing. You choose the mode.
- If you are writing about a narrative text (e.g. story, novel, film video game), address an audience that may not be familiar with your text. Summarize important details or plot features so that your analysis can be meaningful.
- If you are writing about a poem, please give the class a hand out or a visual of the poem and read the poem out loud in your presentation.
- If you are writing about a work of art, please give your audience the image that they can see.
- **Refer to specific details of your text to prove your points!**
- I encourage you to draw from theoretical texts such those by Frederick Jackson Turner, Timothy Carson, Mary Louise Pratt, or theorists of your choosing