

**English 365: Food and Literature**  
DAYS, TIME  
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OFFICE HOURS

"For what is food? It is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior."-- Roland Barthes (1961)

"Food reveals our souls. Like Marcel Proust reminiscing about a madeleine or Calvin Trillin astonished at a plate of ribs, we are entangled in our meals. The connection between identity and consumption gives food a central role in the creation of community, and we use our diet to convey images of public identity." -- Gary Fine, *Kitchens* (1996)

"History celebrates the battlefields whereon we meet our death, but scorns to speak of the plowed fields whereby we thrive; it knows the names of the King's bastards, but cannot tell us the origin of wheat. That is the way of human folly."-- Jean Henry Fabre, French naturalist (1823-1915)

### Required Reading

#### Novels:

Esquivel, Laura. *Like Water for Chocolate*

Reichl, Ruth. *Tender at The Bone: Growing Up at The Table*

Loomis, Susan Herrmann. *On Rue Tatin: Living and Cooking In a French Town*

Ehrlich, Elizabeth. *Miriam's Kitchen: A Memoir*

Abu-Jaber, Diana. *Language of Baklava: A Memoir*

Mehran, Marsha. *Pomegranate Soup: A Novel*

Sheikh, Nazneen. *Tea and Pomegranates*

Li, Leslie. *Daughter of Heaven: A Memoir With Earthly Recipes*

#### Reading Packet:

- Abarca, Meredith. *Voices in The Kitchen*. College Station, TX: Texas A & M Press, 2006. (135-159)
- Ackerman, Diane. *A Natural History of The Senses*. NY: Vintage, 1990. (127-131)
- Biasin, Gian-Paolo. *The Flavors of Modernity: Food And The Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. (3-28)
- Calta, Marialisa. "The Art of The Novel As Cookbook." *NYT*. NY: Feb 17, 1993. 1+.
- Certeau, Michel De, Et Al. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Vol. 2. Trans. Timothy Tomasik. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1998. (183-189)
- Counihan, Carole and Penny Van Esterik. *Food and Culture: A Reader*. NY: Routledge, 1997. (1-7)
- Counihan, Carole. *The Anthropology of Food and Body*. NY: Routledge, 1999. (1-5)
- David, Elizabeth. *South Wind Through The Kitchen*. London: Michael Joseph, 1997. (186-190)
- Fisher, M.F.K. *How to Cook A Wolf*. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1988. (26-45)
- Fussel, Betty. *My Kitchen Wars*. NY: Farrar, Strauss And Giroux, 1999. (3-6)
- Hughes, Marvalene H. "Soul, Black Women, and Food." *Food and Culture: A Reader*. Eds. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik NY: Routledge, 1997. 272-280.
- Kendrick, Walter. "Shut Up And Eat." *NYT Book Review*. NY: Nov 24, 1996. 7-35.
- Lawless, Cecelia. "Cooking, Community, Culture: A Reading Of *Like Water for Chocolate*" In *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories*. Ed. Anne L. Bower. Amherst: University Of Massachusetts Press, 1997. 216-236.
- Lecroy, Anne K. "Cookery Literature or Literary Cookery" In Schofield, Mary Anne. *Cooking By The Book: Food In Literature and Culture*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989. (7-26)
- Leonardi, Susan J. "Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster Á La Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie." *PMLA* 104:3 (May 1989), 340-347.
- Proust, Marcel. *In Search of Lost Time*. Vol. 1 *Swann's Way* (1913). Trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin. NY: Modern Library, 2003. (61-65)
- Schofield, Mary Ann. *Cooking By The Book: Food In Literature and Culture*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989. (2-5)

**Course Description:**

Food is used in literary texts to present interpretations of culture, of history, and of politics from an international scale to an interpersonal one. In this sense, food acts as a gateway to important cultural issues, while language and literary devices are their vehicles of transmission. For this course, we will be concerned with the role of food specifically in literature written by twentieth-century and contemporary “global” American authors (like M.F.K. Fisher who is American but who spends most of her life in France) and ethnic writers. The texts we will read, primarily written by women authors, include fiction and non-fiction: cookbooks, travel writing, memoirs, essays, and novels. In order to identify the meanings of food for the different cultures of the Americas as reflected in literature, we will explore the strategies by which literary texts represent the nexus of geographical, cultural, political, and economic forces that interact in order to influence our culinary value system, food choices, health, and nutritional status. We will also become versed in theoretical issues surrounding not only the reading of literature of the Americas but also of food discourse and food production. Other readings offered in a course packet will ground you in the historical context of the study of food in literature, in the appearance of food references in the history of literature, and in theoretical ideas necessary to the study of food in literature.

This course, while organized around the scholarly topic of food, emphasizes the study of literature. We will engage the cultural issues that literary food references reveal, but we will also pay close attention to the stylistic devices that authors use to transmit ideas about food. Students will especially focus on how writers have used the language of food to convey ideas about identity. While paying careful attention to historical contexts, the course concentrates on the interpretation and aesthetic transformation performed in the texts. The objective here will be to note authors’ uses of language in talking about food and the ways that they use food to talk about other things, i.e. the metaphors they build and the commentaries they construct. Through these approaches, we will accomplish the following: characterize the genre of “food writing” and theorize the nature of cookbooks and recipes as forms of literature. We will also examine the use of the recipe as a narrative device within the genre of the novel.

This course will help you to understand and articulate complex ideas about literature and culture through the topic of food. By studying food literature produced by authors from varied ethnic and religious groups, we develop a greater understanding and acceptance of other ways of life, and by becoming more tolerant of others, we evolve as human beings, becoming healthier by maintaining more informed relationships with others, a process which produces a greater understanding of ourselves. In the process of learning how to articulate the role of food in culture, we become better at understanding and talking about our own identities and those of others.

**Course Objectives:**

The main objective of this course is to work toward a better understanding of how literature (and two film adaptation of food

novels) illustrates and mediates the relationships between food and culture, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic classes, and religion. In order to accomplish this main objective we will employ the following questions during our readings and discussions:

- How can food have different meanings and uses for different people?
- How do such factors as gender, ethnicity, class, religious beliefs, the media, and corporate capitalism affect the foods we choose to eat (and those we choose to avoid) and the manner in which we consume them?
- How does food function both to foster community feeling and drive wedges between people?
- What are some prevailing academic theories that help us identify and understand the more nuanced meanings of food?
- How does attention to food in literature help to develop a deeper understanding of character motivation and the economic influences on the production of literature

**Course Goals:**

In this course, students will. . .

- examine the many roles that food plays in our lives -- as sustenance, as expression of identity, as a form of entertainment, as ritual, and as a means to bring people together into a community;
- identify how food transmits culture;
- compare and contrast food and its social role from a variety of cultures and ethnic traditions;
- assess the differences and consequences of food habits cross-culturally;
- critically discuss the social, cultural, and historical context of food;
- define the concept of foodways -- the beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and values involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of food;
- articulate the role of food in constituting national, gender, and ethnic identity; and
- contextualize agricultural issues within global trends;
- explain the consequences (especially, environmental and cultural) from loss of local food production; and
- act as informed consumers by realizing that their purchases, community involvement, and votes in the ballot box determine our future food security because they affect current planning and resource decisions.

### General Education Class Requirements:

#### Breadth Courses (Area C -- Humanities and Fine Arts):

The principal charge of this area of General Education is to provide students opportunities to develop understanding of human creativity, arts, values, and reasoning. Class, race, ethnic, and gender issues are integrated into this course.

In this course, students will:

- demonstrate a foundation experience that is focused on issues and content that are basic and central to the discipline; and
- demonstrate research and learning from scheduled and specific library assignments, including computer access to information resources.

#### Languages and Literatures (Sub-Area C2)

In this course, students will demonstrate:

- knowledge of languages and literatures and the diverse cultural traditions they represent through the study of literature; and an
- understanding, appreciation, and interpretation of language as a literary and culture artifact and use language as a literary, cultural, or creative vehicle of communication.

#### Additional requirements: Cultural Events

The GE requirements for the College of Humanities and Fine Arts state that you are expected to attend or participate in four events related to your study in this GE course. I will provide information about possible events during the semester, but I also encourage you to make announcements and to share opportunities to attend or participate in cultural events with your classmates. If this course is taught online only, there will be a separate folder in our discussion section for your write-ups of these cultural events.

#### Library Requirements:

The GE requirements for the College of Humanities and Fine Arts also state that you are expected to perform research either in the library and/or online. Be extremely careful when using the Internet to research topics. Some of the information found on it is erroneous, some superficial.

## Assignments

Attendance and Participation (15%): See “attendance grades” below.

Reading Journal (20%): You should hand in 8 journal entries. Entries are the equivalent of a short paper (one or two-pages) responding to the readings, but also analyzing your own food culture. Journal entries should reveal close, perceptive reading of text and reflection on how issues in the text relate to your own life. General responses that show little or no reading of the text will be downgraded. As a general guideline, you should try to incorporate an analysis of at least one of the novels we are reading into each journal entry. To start your journals, you may want to reflect on the significance of one or two of the following questions:

- How does your diet relate to your family upbringing? Do you reproduce your parents’ daily meal schedule? Do certain foods remind you of your childhood? Do you remember instances when you parents or your school teacher forced you to eat food you disliked?
- How does your diet relate to your own identity (gender, ethnicity, class, etc.)? What food do you eat that you think best marks your own tastes? Are there ways in which you assert yourself determining when, how, and what to eat? What has changed in your diet since you left your family or since you started college?
- How do you do your grocery shopping? Where do you shop? How do you spend your money on food? Do you think about your health or the environment? What are your concerns when grocery shopping?
- What do you know about the history of the food you eat? What do you know about the food you buy? What do you know about the food you order in restaurants? Who harvests the food you eat? How is it exported or imported? What do you know about certain ethnic foods in restaurants or served at a friend’s home – do you know where and how this food is eaten, and with whom or for what occasion it is normally eaten? What meaning is attached to it in its original culture?

[Questions adapted from Professor Cecilia Novero’s syllabus for Reading/Eating: The Narratives of Food]

In-Class Presentation (15% of grade): Each student will be responsible for a class presentation. For this assignment, you will have to make one of the recipes included in one of the novels we are reading (ahead of time, at home). In your presentation, you will tell the class about that process and analyze the directions given for the recipe. How did the dish turn out? Were you able to make the dish just as it was written or were there steps left out? If the author left something out, what was it and how is that significant? Were any of the ingredients hard to find? You will also do research on the food/dish or ingredients required to make the dish. Using library databases and catalogs and/or internet materials, you will research the history and the cultural significance of the food or foods. Presentations should be about 15 minutes.

Paper Assignment (Recipe memoir) (15%): Write a short compelling memoir essay recalling a recipe you have made with friends or family (or a dish or meal that you have eat with friends or family), maybe even one given to you by someone special or inspired by someone special. Your story should include the recipe and reveal the memories you have associated with this dish. Your story should include a beginning, middle, and an end. These should be memories with an edge and some depth. They may be amusing, satirical, disturbing, sad, poignant, powerful, and/or uplifting. I encourage you to reveal your feelings and reflect your culture and character. I will provide you with an example of a recipe memoir that I have written.

Final Exam (Essay Questions) (20%): A cumulative final exam will be held during the scheduled final exam time. The exam will focus on the literary aspects (themes, issues, plot, and character development) of the novels that we have read and discussed. The exam will also encompass the main theoretical concepts introduced through reading and discussion of the reading packet materials.

Cultural Events (15%): Part of your grade will be based on a write-up of cultural events that you have attended this semester. Because this is a General Education course, you will be expected to attend 4 cultural events during the semester and submit reports about each of them. In the last week of the semester, you must turn in one-page report for each of the 4 cultural events you have attended. Your report should not just summarize the event. Your report must show reflection and critical thinking, particularly by addressing how the event helped expand your knowledge and understanding of food related issues (such as health, nutrition, the body, etc.) or issues related to the literature we have studied (a talk by an author, the movie adaptation of a food novel, etc.) Your selection of cultural events might also include PBS broadcasts or documentaries, musical performances, plays, lectures, festivals, a trip to the farmer's market (during which you take notes), or any event outside of class that you attend and that you can relate to the study of food in literature.

#### **Grades:**

- A: Work of this quality is superior and represents an achievement normally attained by only a small amount of students.
- B: "B" level work is better than adequate and shows strong competence in the subject matter/skill.
- C: "C" quality work shows adequate or satisfactory mastery of the subject/skill.
- D: "D" level work barely meets the minimum requirements for the course or assignment.
- F: Failing grades are reserved for work that falls below the minimum requirements for the course.

100-97.0% = A+ (final course grade of 'A')	96.9-95.0% = A	94.9-90.0% = A-
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89.9-87.0% = B+	86.9-83.0% = B	82.9-80.0% = B-
79.9-77.0% = C+	76.9-73.0% = C	72.9-70.0% = C-
69.9-67.0% = D+	66.9-63.0% = D	62.9-60.0% = D-
59.9-0% = F		

### **THINGS THAT WILL NEGATIVELY AFFECT YOUR GRADE:**

- INCOMPLETE ASSIGNMENTS
- LATE ASSIGNMENTS
- POORLY REALIZED ASSIGNMENTS
- DISRESPECTFUL ATTITUDE
- ABSENCES (YOU WILL AUTOMATICALLY FAIL IF YOU MISS MORE THAN 2 WEEKS WORTH OF CLASS)
- TARDINESS TO CLASS
- LEAVING CLASS EARLY
- DISRUPTING CLASS IN ANY OTHER WAY
- BEING UNPREPARED FOR CLASS
- PLAGIARISM (ANY SUSPICION OF PLAGIARISM WILL BE TURNED OVER TO STUDENT JUDICIAL AFFAIRS AND COULD RESULT IN YOUR FAILURE OF THE COURSE AND/OR EXPULSION FROM THE UNIVERSITY)

### **ATTENDANCE, ABSENCES, AND PARTICIPATION**

I will call roll at the beginning of each class. I expect you to raise your hand, look at me, and say “here” or “present.” It is your responsibility to make sure that I have marked you on the attendance roll. If you come to class late (which you should not make a habit of), you need to see me after class has ended to be sure that I have marked you present. There are no excused absences unless you are on official university business and have turned in the properly signed paperwork to me in advance of the day(s) you will miss class.

### **LATE WORK**

You should turn your work in on time. Late assignments will be appropriately downgraded. I do not give make-up exams. I do not accept assignments once a week has passed after the due date.

### **NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY**

According to the University Catalog, California State University does not discriminate on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, disability, race, color, or national origin. If you have a disability and need reasonable accommodation for equal access to education and services at CSU Chico, you must register with Disability Support Services V/TTY: 898-5959.

### **UNIVERSITY POLICY ON ACADEMIC RIGOR**

Rigorous students are part of the equation of rigorous teaching and learning. A rigorous education is vigorous, difficult, deeply satisfying work, and it requires a lifestyle conducive to achieving excellence. College is not a temporary diversion or a period of

entertainment, but a fundamental piece of student character, citizenship, and employment future. A diploma and good grades from a demanding institution count for something.

Rigorous students do the following:

- SET HIGH PERSONAL STANDARDS, DEVELOP A STRONG SENSE OF PURPOSE, COME TO CLASS WELL-PREPARED, AND COMPLETE ASSIGNMENTS ON TIME.
- DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE INSTRUCTOR, IN AND OUTSIDE OF CLASS, AND MAKE THE MOST OF UNIVERSITY ADVISING AND OTHER SERVICES.
- TREAT FELLOW STUDENTS AND THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT WITH COMPLETE RESPECT. GIVE EACH CLASS FULL ATTENTION AND PARTICIPATION. DO NOT MISS CLASS, ARRIVE LATE, OR LEAVE EARLY.
- ACCEPT CONTINUING RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEARNING AND FOR GRADES EARNED.
- APPROACH EACH CLASS IN A PROFESSIONAL MANNER, AS IF THE CLASS WERE REAL EMPLOYMENT. TREAT A FULL-COURSE LOAD AS FULL-TIME WORK AND SPEND NO LESS TIME ON IT. DETERMINE EXACTLY WHAT IS EXPECTED.
- EXPERIMENT WITH ALL TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES USED IN CLASSES, AND ALSO DETERMINE WHICH WORK BEST FOR THEM.
- DEMONSTRATE COMPLETE HONESTY AND INTEGRITY.

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

The readings listed under each class period are what we discuss that day. You should have read the assignment completely before you come to class. This is a tentative schedule and is subject to change and/or revision.

Week 1

Novel (1st Half): Esquivel, Laura. *Like Water for Chocolate*

Reading Packet: Calta

Week 2

Novel (2nd Half): Esquivel, Laura. *Like Water for Chocolate*

Reading Packet: Lawless

Week 3

Novel (1st Half): Reichl, Ruth. *Tender at The Bone: Growing Up At The Table*

Reading Packet: Lecroy

Week 4

Novel (2nd Half): Reichl, Ruth. *Tender at The Bone: Growing Up At The Table*

Reading Packet: Kendrick

Week 5

Novel (1st Half): Loomis, Susan Herrmann. *On Rue Tatin: Living and Cooking In a French Town*

Reading Packet: Leonardi

Week 6

Novel (2nd Half): Loomis, Susan Herrmann. *On Rue Tatin: Living and Cooking In a French Town*

Reading Packet: Schofield

Week 7

Novel (1st Half): Ehrlich, Elizabeth. *Miriam's Kitchen: A Memoir*

Reading Packet: Counihan (X2)

Week 8

Novel (2nd Half): Ehrlich, Elizabeth. *Miriam's Kitchen: A Memoir*

Reading Packet: Biasin

Week 9

Novel (1st Half): Abu-Jaber, Diana. *Language of Baklava: A Memoir*

Reading Packet: Certeau

Week 10

Novel (2nd Half): Abu-Jaber, Diana. *Language of Baklava: A Memoir*

Reading Packet: Abarca

Week 11

Novel (1st Half): Mehran, Marsha. *Pomegranate Soup: A Novel*

Reading Packet: Ackerman

Week 12

Novel (2nd Half): Mehran, Marsha. *Pomegranate Soup: A Novel*

Reading Packet: Hughes

Week 13

Novel (1st Half): Sheikh, Nazneed. *Tea and Pomegranates*

Reading Packet: Proust

Week 14

Novel (2nd Half): Sheikh, Nazneed. *Tea and Pomegranates*

Reading Packet: Fisher

Week 15

Novel (1st Half): Li, Leslie. *Daughter of Heaven: A Memoir With Earthly Recipes*

Reading Packet: David

Week 16

Novel (2nd Half): Li, Leslie. *Daughter of Heaven: A Memoir With Earthly Recipes*

Reading Packet: Fussel

Final Exam: To Be Announced