



Carol Osborne

Curriculum Project

Fulbright-Hays Seminars Abroad: History and Culture of China 2009

Introduction

This curriculum project is a product of my desire to incorporate what I learned during the 2009 Fulbright-Hays Seminar as soon as I returned to my classes and the constraints imposed by my fall teaching schedule. My upper-level course in Contemporary American Literature was obviously not a suitable venue (though the inclusion of Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* did allow me to address Chinese history and culture for a week out of the semester), so I turned to my three sections of Literature and Composition, the second English course in our university's core curriculum. As the title suggests, this course builds on the research and writing skills acquired in the first English requirement, but in this case, focuses primarily on literary analysis. Having already ordered two books, a British drama (Peter Shaffer's *Equus*) and a Canadian novel (Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*), I decided to begin the course with a collection of short stories, Kirk A. Denton's *China: A Traveler's Literary Companion*. The students would ease their way into literary analysis by discussing the short stories as I supplied background information and they conducted their own research into some aspect of the history and culture of China. The students who had placed out of the first composition course would profit from the early emphasis on research skills, and those sophomores who had delayed taking the second course would benefit from the review and expansion of those skills early in the course.

I am grateful to Dr. Charles Laughlin, one of the Fulbright-Hays speakers, for recommending Denton's collection. Arranged by setting, the stories range from Lu Xun's "Hometown," written in 1921, to "White Bristle, Black Bristles," originally published in 2003 and translated for this volume in 2008. For my curriculum unit, I selected nine stories that seemed to offer the most promise of engaging the students, that illustrated a range of styles, and that utilized a wide array of literary devices. Comments on the students' reactions to the selected stories can be found in the last section of the project, but in general, they seemed to like our departure from the standard fare for ENGL 102.

I introduced the unit by sharing a brief overview of my month in China and by expressing my desire that this curriculum open up new windows of experience for all of us. I justified our study of stories from China, in particular, with the argument that, given our contemporary global society, it is important that we all know more about other cultures, particularly those that promise to figure so prominently in shaping the world in our lifetime. I also spoke of the advantages of reading literature without the weight of critical commentary hanging over us, of both the students and the professor engaging in the act of interpretation with fresh material. I did admit the difficulties the curriculum would pose: we would be reading translations rather than the original texts, and we would be attempting to interpret stories that have emerged from a cultural and historical context with which we are relatively unfamiliar.

As we were reading and discussing the short stories (and I was supplying background information to help the students visualize the settings and/or understand the social critique underlying many of the narratives), the students were researching a topic of their own choosing within the broad category of Chinese History and Culture. To help them conduct this research and create their oral and written projects and their annotated bibliographies, I included a library tour and mini-lessons in summary, paraphrase, synthesis, MLA format, the use of quotations, and the evaluation of sources as part of the curriculum. I have included in the Fulbright-Hays Curriculum Project only the research lessons that pertain specifically to China, but those of you interested in teaching this unit may want to access

the library guide constructed for my students' use: http://libguides.coastal.edu/Chinese_Studies. I see my role in the first-year course as something greater than an instructor of writing and literature; I also attempt to help students transition from the mental viewpoint of high school students to become more independent, self-directed scholars. This goal, in terms of the research project that was central to this unit, involves not only giving students the ability to access and use the specialized databases (rather than Wikipedia) and to evaluate the credibility of their sources, but also to direct their own lines of inquiry, and to determine their own purpose, audience, and format for the presentation of information. More importantly, I wanted them to realize how little they know in relation to what there is to know, and to be more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty. Both the short stories and the research projects helped me to attain these goals.

Goals of the Unit:

1. To become more familiar with the history and culture of China
2. To practice the skills of academic scholarship in locating, evaluating, drawing from, and referencing a variety of resources
3. To become more aware of the approaches that literary critics take in analyzing and interpreting texts
4. To practice the skills of literary analysis and to acquire the language that makes clear communication of this analysis possible

Objectives:

Students will

1. Demonstrate the ability to choose a topic and narrow the focus of that topic sufficiently to enable a collection of detailed, useful resources
2. Demonstrate the ability to locate a variety of resources using the databases and other search engines suitable for academic scholarship
3. Demonstrate the ability to summarize, evaluate, compare, and synthesize the content of a variety of resources
4. Demonstrate the ability to share information orally and in writing, giving proper attribution to secondary resources
5. Demonstrate the ability to read with understanding, to create questions that will lead to a deeper analysis of the structure, techniques, and meaning of a literary work, and to express their interpretative responses to these questions clearly and effectively both orally and in writing
6. Demonstrate the ability to draw connections between two works of literature
7. Demonstrate the ability to make inferences about cultural and historical influences through examination of a work of literature
8. Demonstrate their understanding of key literary terms (tone, mood, imagery, character development, narrative structure, flashback, foreshadowing, symbolism, satire, irony, theme) and literary devices (simile, metaphor, personification)

Essential Questions

Literary Analysis: What do these contemporary short stories reveal about the history, culture, and people of China? How do writers use characters, setting, imagery, and other literary devices to convey meaning?

Research: What do I know about China? What resources can I consult to corroborate or expand this knowledge? What have I learned about China? How can I most effectively communicate this knowledge to my audience?