

EN120G: Language, Thought, and Writing:
Community Literacy and Migration
4 Credits * Fall 2023

Instructor: Dyani Johns Taff
Class Time: MWF 10:00-10:50 am
Class Location: Miller 319

Contact: dtaff@colby.edu
Office: Miller 225
Office Hours: [MW 2:30-3:30pm & By Appt.](#)

Writing Fellow: Carly Levinsohn (celevi24@colby.edu) **Office Hours:** TBA



From the Council of Europe Statement on human rights and migration: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/european-states-must-put-human-rights-at-the-centre-of-their-migration-policies>

Course Description

Where are we and what are we doing here? How did we get here and how do we know what we know? What's next and who needs to hear our stories? These three sets of questions will guide our exploration of personal essays, literary texts, scholarly criticism, images, and more as we seek to gain literacy—not only the ability to read and write but also to engage cultural knowledge—about Colby College and Waterville, about the communities from which we come, and about the concept of migration. We will examine our arrival in the Colby College community through reflective, analytical, narrative, and research-based writing, peer editing, and other literacy-focused activities. We will place our own stories in relation to those of writers from the past and the present, including Shakespeare, Joy Harjo, Margaret Cavendish, bell hooks, and Mohsin Hamid. Our goal will be to develop a successful college-level writing practice while gaining a textured understanding of what it takes to migrate, what kinds of knowledge we bring with us when we do, and how humans gain literacy and become creators of new knowledge when we join new communities.

In addition to exploring communities, literacy, and migration, students in this course will work together toward the [Student Learning Outcomes for First-Year, Writing-Intensive Courses](#) (W1s). We will read and discuss these outcomes and the actions students can take to develop as college-level writers.

We are extremely fortunate this semester to have our very own [Writing Fellow](#), Carly Levinsohn who will attend some of our class session and hold office hours. You are required to meet with Carly at least once during the semester. Carly is a Computer Science and English double major with a minor in mathematics; she is ready to help you with any part of the writing process and to support you as you complete your work for this course.

Texts

The following required books are available at the Colby College Bookstore. Please buy these editions in hard copy (not ebook) as soon as possible. **If you have trouble locating or paying for these books, contact me and I can help.** I have placed copies of all three of our books on reserve at the Miller Library for your use as well.

- *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare, eds. Bate and Rasmussen (Modern Library Edition, ISBN 9780812969238)
- *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid (ISBN: 9780735212206)
- *They Say / I Say* by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, 5th edition (ISBN: 978-0-393-53870-0)

All other readings will be available as PDFs on Perusall (accessed through Moodle). You might also find a grammar and style handbook useful. Check out Karen Gordon's *The Deluxe Transitive Vampire*, Diana Hacker's *Pocket Manual of Style* or Richard Bullock and Francine Weinberg's *The Little Seagull Handbook*. The [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) and the [Colby College Library "All About Citations" Guide](#) are excellent, free resources for citation, grammar, and writing help.

Grading System

I take a holistic approach to grading, aiming to reward process, collective support, and *learning* in as many forms as we can imagine it. I am inspired by the research of scholars including Alfie Kohn, Asao Inoue, Cathy Davidson, and Jesse Stommel; their work and my own observations of students during my fifteen years of teaching have led me to believe that numerical and letter grades are not especially useful tools for assessment and feedback. They can, in fact, cause harm and reflect systemic biases.

I have modeled our assignments and assessment structure on labor-based contract grading and ungrading systems. These systems seek to measure students' work differently, accounting for as many modes of learning as possible, and seeking to create equitable, socially just classrooms where students feel comfortable taking risks, exploring and being brave about new ways of speaking, reading, and writing, and even experiencing failure: these are key aspects of the process of learning.

We will work together—as a class community as well as in our one-on-one meetings—to reflect on and assess the work—the labor—that I ask you to complete this semester. I have designed all assignments for this course with care; everything I ask you to do is meant to support your work in **four core areas** that I take to be vital in learning to write at the college level:

1. Community

Proximity—simply being together in a room—does not equal community: making our class into a community takes the hard, rewarding work of being an engaged citizen. Assignments include: arriving on time to class sessions having completed reading and other assignments, **participating** fully during class **verbally or otherwise**, large and small group work, formal and informal **peer review** and class **discussion leadership** activities.

2. Textual Engagement

Our texts are essential materials for learning in this course; they function like lab equipment for a science course or paints and brushes for an art course. We'll learn about literacy, community, migration, writing, ourselves, and each other by *reading* and engaging actively with our texts both before and during class. To promote active reading, and to extend our learning community beyond the classroom, you will complete **at least 2 Perusall entries each week**. These entries can take the form of questions, annotations, or responses, and ideally, you'll engage in all three over the course of the semester.

3. Writing

We often think of writing as a medium of communication, which it is. But writing can also serve as a means for thinking itself; I often use messy drafts and freewriting to work out what I *actually* think or feel about a topic, or to organize my understanding, or to work through or synthesize complex or overwhelming scholarly work. We will do many kinds of writing, informal and formal, in this class, but your main assignments will include: weekly **in-class writing workshops**, **six mini-essays (~500 words)**, and a **portfolio essay (2000-2500 words)**. We will engage in drafting, peer-review, and revision work throughout the semester, and you will **meet with me and our writing fellow 1-1** to discuss your work.

4. Reflection and Revision

As you complete your work for this course, I want you to think actively about *why* and *how* you are doing the work you are engaged in, and about how your work will influence your next steps within and beyond my course. Honest reflection is a powerful tool, and sustained learning cannot take place without it. To promote reflective thinking, you will track your time in a **labor log** for a month, and complete two detailed **self-assessments** (one at mid-semester and one at the end). You will also create a **portfolio** that showcases your learning.

Detailed assignment directions will be available on Moodle and in the assignment handbook; see below for reading advice.

You will assess your work in these core areas, and I will use your self-assessments to arrive at your course grade.

As a general baseline, completing assignments in a timely, thoughtful manner will earn you a B; rushed, missing, or otherwise lack-luster work will earn you a lower grade; work that exceeds expectations, deepens your own or the community's learning, or otherwise goes above and beyond will earn you a higher grade.

Community Care Policies and Resources

We are continuing to learn how to live with Covid-19; the Public Health Emergency Declaration in the US expired in May 2023, but we also know that Covid-19 is still circulating and vulnerable members of our communities are still at risk. I assume that each of you has your own complex relationship with the virus and its fallout over the last three years. We are all also subject to a welter of other circumstances that can affect our mental and physical health. In response, **we need to prioritize an ethic of care: caring for yourself and caring for your community.** Here are policies designed to promote self and community care:

- **Masks are optional;** I encourage you to wear a mask if you have a cold or other respiratory illness (Covid-19 or otherwise), if you have recently traveled by bus, train, or plane, if you think you might have been exposed to Covid-19, or for any other reason that you might have to keep germs in or out. **I will bring a few extra masks to class with me every day; if you need one, just ask.**
 - [A new Covid booster is coming this fall](#) and will likely be available on campus; I strongly encourage you to get a booster! Keeping up-to-date on your vaccinations can do A LOT to control transmission in our community and beyond.
 - *****If ANY member of our class community needs us to mask for their safety, we will alter this policy.** Please contact me as soon as possible if you need us to mask FOR ANY REASON: no need to explain why. Simply email me and write: “Dear Prof. Taff, I request that we wear masks in class for my safety.”
- **Attendance and missing class:** In order to create and sustain a compassionate community, we all need to commit to preparing for class, showing up, and attending to what members of our community (students and professor) say and ask of us. That said, our lives our complicated; if, for any reason at all, you are unable to attend one or more of our class sessions, you may complete an **alternative attendance** assignment, described in the in-class notes document, that will count for participation in the missed session.
 - *****We’ll need a critical mass of folks in class each week.** Participating asynchronously (after class has happened) will mean that you will miss out on group work and real-time insights. **Please prioritize synchronous, in-person participation,** but use this option as a back-up whenever you need to.
- **Late work:** Completing course assignments on time is part of how you show your commitment to community, textual engagement, and writing work. Completing assignments on time will also save you from the stress of having assignments pile up. That said, we all sometimes find ourselves overwhelmed or in need of more time for one reason or another. A minor late assignment here or there is fine. Chronic lateness will affect your grade because it will affect your ability to complete the course work in a thoughtful, timely way.
- **Academic Support:** The Dean of Studies office offers comprehensive academic support in the form of academic success programs, learning consultants, tutors, and much more. [Consult the academic success page to learn more.](#)

- **Financial Security:** If you need support so that you can buy textbooks or food, pay rent, buy or borrow a laptop or interview clothes, or any other kind of financial relief, [contact your class Dean](#) (they are friendly and ready to help! If you want help reaching out, let me know!).
- **Counseling Services:** [Colby College provides cost-free mental health and counseling services](#) to help you manage challenges that threaten your personal or academic wellbeing. **Getting help when you need it is the smart, courageous thing to do.** I am not a mental health professional, but I can make you an appointment, walk with you to Counseling Services, discuss coursework-related stress (and make plans to alleviate it), or help you to see or know when you need to get help beyond my expertise. **Email me any time.**
- **Access and Disability Services:** In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodations will be provided to qualified students with documented disabilities. Students seeking accommodations should start by contacting the [Office of Student Access & Disability Services](#).
- **The Farnham Writers' Center:** From the FWC's website: "The FWC is a place for you to get skilled feedback on your writing. Our peer writing tutors have experience working with Colby's diverse student populations, and they are eager to engage you in collaborative conversations about your writing." [To learn more and to make an appointment, visit their website.](#) The Writers' Center also has a Multilingual Writing Specialist, Dr. Chaoran Wang, who meets individually with international and multilingual students and provides workshops to support multilingual writers. You can reach her at chaowang@colby.edu. Please feel free to contact her, either to discuss your writing concerns and issues in general or to discuss a specific course-related writing assignment.
- **Academic Integrity:** Please read [the Colby Affirmation](#) and review Colby's policies and resources regarding [academic integrity](#). It is the responsibility of every student and faculty member to be familiar with, and comply with, these expectations for honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility. If you have any questions at any time about whether or how to cite a source, about when it's ok to collaborate and when you must work alone, or other topics relating to your own or others' conduct, please ask me! I am happy to explain how to correctly give credit where credit is due or to discuss other concerns.
- **Sexual Misconduct/Title IX Statement:** Colby College prohibits and will not tolerate sexual misconduct or gender-based discrimination of any kind. [Colby is legally obligated to investigate sexual misconduct](#) (including, but not limited to sexual assault and sexual harassment). If you wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct, please contact Colby Counseling Services (207-859-4490) or the Director of the Gender and Sexual Diversity Program, Emily Schusterbauer (207-859-4093).
 - Please note that as your professor, I am designated a "responsible employee," a legal category that requires me to report to the Title IX Coordinator, Meg Hatch (207-859-4266) if you disclose an experience related to sexual misconduct. This is not as scary as it sounds: if I contact Meg, she and her office will email you. If you want to follow up, you can. If not, you don't have to.

- **I will support you whatever you decide:** I can connect you to community resources for dealing with sexual misconduct without you needing to disclose specific information to me. If you wish to disclose a specific incident to me, I will help to connect you to Meg Hatch. The college will take initial steps to address the incident(s), protect and support those directly affected, and enhance the safety of our community. Meg Hatch will work with you to determine the best way to proceed.
- **Bias Incident Prevention and Response Team (BIPR):** From the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion website: “BIPR is a non-disciplinary body charged with both responding to bias incident reports and implementing educational initiatives designed to decrease the frequency of bias incidents in our community. Community members who have experienced and/or witnessed a bias incident are encouraged to submit a BIPR report or contact BIPR chair Emily Schusterbauer (207-859-4093).” [To submit a Bias Incident Report, click this link.](#)

Course Schedule

The following schedule will give you an overview of our readings, topics, and schedule of assignments for the semester.

*****This schedule is subject to change, as needed, throughout the semester.** Our Moodle site will be our home base: I will update checklists and assignments there regularly.

Reminder: for a 4-credit course, you should expect to spend approximately 8 hours per week on your work *outside of class*. Some weeks you will need more than 8 hours and some less; I have designed my assignments with that time frame in mind. Plan your time outside of class accordingly and get in touch if you have questions!

	Readings and Assignments
Week 1:	<p><u>Unit 1: Where are we? What are we doing here?</u></p> <p><u>W Sept 6:</u> Course Introductions</p> <p><u>F Sept 8:</u> Read Alfie Kohn, “The Case Against Grades”; visit the Museum, with special attention to the “Painted: Our Bodies, Hearts, and Village”—read the captions!</p>
Week 2:	<p><u>M Sept 11:</u> Read bell hooks, “Engaged Pedagogy” and Langston Hughes, “Theme for English B”</p> <p><u>W Sept 13:</u> Special Collections Visit: Robinson Room</p> <p><u>F Sept 14:</u> Workshop 1: come to class prepared to start writing about your community text; read <i>They Say / I Say</i>, Introduction</p>

<p>Week 3:</p>	<p><u>M Sept 18:</u> Read Karen Russel, “St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves”</p> <p><u>W Sept 20:</u> Student Leaders: Rhetorical Analysis of Community Texts Mini-Essay 1 DUE W Sept 20 by 11:55 pm on Moodle</p> <p><u>F Sept 22:</u> Student Leaders: Rhetorical Analysis of Community Texts</p>
<p>Week 4:</p>	<p><u>M Sept 25:</u> Student Leaders: Rhetorical Analysis of Community Texts</p> <p><u>W Sept 27:</u> Student Leaders: Rhetorical Analysis of Community Texts</p> <p><u>F Sept 29:</u> Student Leaders: Rhetorical Analysis of Community Texts</p>
<p>Week 5:</p>	<p><u>Unit 2: How did we get here? How do we know what we know?</u></p> <p><u>M Oct 2:</u> Watch Language, Land, & Belonging; read Rita Joe, “I Lost My Talk,” “I am the Indian,” “Who are you?” “Images from the past,” “I lay my body upon the grass,” “There is a hill,” and the glossary.</p> <p><u>W Oct 4:</u> Read Joy Harjo, “Ah, Ah,” “A Map to the Next World,” and “Invisible Fish”; Louise Erdrich, “The Butcher’s Wife,” “I was Sleeping Where the Black Oaks Move,” and “Birth.” REVISED Mini-Essay 1 DUE W Oct 4 by 11:55 pm on Moodle</p> <p><u>F Oct 6:</u> Workshop 2; read <i>They Say / I Say</i>, Chps. 1-2.</p> <p>Labor Log and Reflection DUE F Oct 6 by 11:55pm.</p>
<p>Week 6:</p> <p>1-1 Writing Meetings (Th+F)</p>	<p><u>M Oct 9:</u> NO CLASS—Fall Recess</p> <p><u>W Oct 11:</u> Read Li-Young Lee, “Persimmons”; Rita Dove, “Parsley”; and Walcott, “A Far Cry from Africa” Mini-Essay 2 DUE W Oct 11 by 11:55pm on Moodle</p> <p><u>F Oct 13:</u> Workshop 3; read <i>They Say / I Say</i>, Chp. 3.</p>
<p>Week 7:</p> <p>1-1 Writing Meetings (Th+F)</p>	<p><u>M Oct 16:</u> Read Phyllis Wheatley, “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” “On Imagination”; and John Milton, excerpts from <i>Paradise Lost</i>.</p>

	<p><u>W Oct 18</u>: Read or re-read one or two poems by Milton and/or Wheatley; Reginald Wilburn, “Phyllis Wheatley and the ‘Miracle’ of Miltonic Influence” Mini-Essay 3 DUE W Oct 18 by 11:55pm on Moodle</p> <p><u>F Oct 20</u>: Workshop 4; <i>They Say / I Say</i>, Chp. 4.</p>
Week 8:	<p>Mid-Semester Self-Assessment DUE M Oct 23 by 11:55pm on Moodle</p> <p><u>M Oct 23</u>: In-class Self-Assessment work; read Margaret Cavendish, “Of Many Worlds in This World,” “The Hunting of the Hare,” “Of a Spider’s Web”; and Anon. “The Seafarer”</p> <p><u>W Oct 25</u>: William Shakespeare, <i>Twelfth Night</i>, Act 1. Mini-Essay 4 DUE W Oct 25 by 11:55pm on Moodle</p> <p><u>F Oct 27</u>: Workshop 5; <i>They Say / I Say</i>, Chp. 5</p>
Week 9:	<p><u>M Oct 30</u>: Shakespeare, <i>Twelfth Night</i>, Act 2</p> <p><u>W Nov 1</u>: Kemp, “Transgender Rhetoric,” Akhimie, excerpt from <i>Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference</i>, and Mentz, “Beachcombing: <i>Twelfth Night</i>.” Mini-Essay 5 DUE W Nov 1 by 11:55pm on Moodle</p> <p><u>F Nov 3</u>: Workshop 6; <i>They Say / I Say</i>, Chps. 6-7</p>
Week 10:	<p><u>M Nov 6</u>: Shakespeare, <i>Twelfth Night</i>, Act 3</p> <p><u>W Nov 8</u>: Shakespeare, <i>Twelfth Night</i>, Acts 4-5 Mini-Essay 6 DUE W Nov 8 by 11:55pm on Moodle</p> <p><u>F Nov 10</u>: Workshop 7; <i>They Say / I Say</i>, Chps. 8-9</p>
Week 11:	<p><u>Unit 3: What do we do now? Who needs to hear our stories?</u></p> <p><u>M Nov 13</u>: Mohsin Hamid, <i>Exit West</i>, parts 1-3</p> <p><u>W Nov 15</u>: Hamid, <i>Exit West</i>, parts 4-5</p> <p><u>F Nov 17</u>: Workshop 8; <i>They Say / I Say</i>, Chps. 10-11</p>
Week 12:	<p><u>M&T Nov 20-1</u>: 1-1 Portfolio Essay Meetings</p>

	<u>W&F Nov 22-4: NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Break</u>
Week 13: Portfolio essay meetings	<u>M Nov 27:</u> Hamid, <i>Exit West</i> , parts 6-9 <u>W Nov 29:</u> Hamid, <i>Exit West</i> , parts 10-12 <u>F Dec 1:</u> Portfolio Essay DRAFT due before class on Google Docs; bring your laptop and be ready to share your draft with me and your peers
Week 14: Portfolio essay meetings	Peer Review Letters DUE by 11:55pm on M Dec 4 (write them at the bottom of your peers' drafts). <u>M Dec 4:</u> Portfolio preparation; read Trimble, "Openers" and re-read <i>They Say / I Say</i> , Chp. 11 (especially pp. 165-170) <u>W Dec 6:</u> Portfolio Presentations <u>F Dec 8:</u> Portfolio Presentations Portfolio DUE Sunday Dec 10 by 11:55pm on Moodle.
	Final Self-Assessment DUE F Dec 15 by 11:55pm on Moodle.

A few notes on reading

All students read at different rates and different texts require different kinds of attention and time. Think about how it feels to read a twitter feed, a novel, a comic, a text from a friend, an art book, a poem, a play, a scholarly article, a scientific paper: these texts all invite you to engage in very different ways. This semester, we will be reading a wide variety of texts of varying length, topic, and density. **If you are struggling, or if it feels difficult to read our texts, don't worry:** that probably means you're doing it right! I can guarantee that you aren't alone in those feelings of struggle and difficulty. Here are a few things to try when the reading gets tough:

- **Assess your time/space:** try reading at a different time of day or in a different location. Some texts might require perfect silence, and some might actually feel easier to read with some ambient noise or music (in a coffee house, for instance).
- **Poems and other artistic texts:** re-reading is key! Read once quickly, for sound and initial impressions. Read again for comprehension. Read again for line breaks, rhymes, puns, metaphors, and so on. Your subsequent reads need not be linear! You might start in the middle or end; the key is to make time and space for reading slowly and re-reading.
- **Scholarly articles:** master the strategic skim. Read the first ~5 pages slowly and carefully, looking for the writer's central argument or point. Next, read section titles and topic sentences, and consider slowing down for a few paragraphs in the middle to see how the writer is using evidence (and to see what kind of evidence they're using). Next, read the conclusion or the final 3 paragraphs slowly. With your remaining time, go back and re-read as needed to clarify your understanding, ask questions, apply ideas, etc.
- **Use your resources (be a skeptical googler!):** bring the power of the internet to bear on your reading; I fully support you using SparkNotes, LitCharts, Schmoop, Wikipedia, and so on to aid you in understanding our texts. BUT: please note that although these sites provide great summaries, they also have errors and frequently provide one-dimensional or overly simplistic analyses. ALSO: **always, always, always** cite if you make use of these or any other aids in your writing or Perusall entries!
- **Listen to an audio book while you follow along in the text:** If listening while you read is helpful, check out LibriVox: they have crowd-sourced, FREE audio versions of many, many texts. One cautionary note: the reader quality is variable, and intonation IS interpretation, in my view. BUT: do you want to know how I got through reading James Joyce's *Ulysses* in college and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in grad school (twice!)? I read along while listening to LibriVox recordings. Particularly useful for difficult or long texts, but helpful for anything you're reading.
- **Come to office hours:** I am always happy to talk more about our texts, to read sections slowly with you, to clarify key concepts, and so on.

The Most Important Thing: embrace uncertainty and do your best.

Reading *some* is infinitely better than reading *none*; sit calmly with your confusion about or boredom with or other reaction to a text you're reading, read as much of it as you can, and then, crucially, try to articulate your confusion to our class. Engagement does not mean mastery; spend time, slowly, with our texts, and then bring your reactions, observations, perplexities, and so on with you to Perusall and to class for discussion.