

**Asian Studies 491- Z Topics in Asian Studies /English 374 Race, Ethnicity, and Literature or
English 494 Study Abroad in England
Black and Asian Literature of the Diaspora in Britain [WI]**

Instructor: Professor Mimi Sharma

Classroom: TBA

Email: sharma@hawaii.edu

Class Time: TBA

Literature is an extremely important way to imagine lives and worlds and to represent social realities. This course explores the *social context* of the act of writing—rather than the stylistic, textual analysis—by exploring imagery and constructions of identity that are produced through the Black and Asian, diasporic communities in Britain. It studies the projection of stereotypes and sense of place that have shaped cultural perceptions through a consideration of different texts (and films) and considers how such productions have themselves been influenced by shifts in political, economic, and individual orientations.

Much attention has been given to representations of the exotic “Other” produced through British contestations with African, Asian, and Caribbean peoples in the context of colonial conquest. This course, on the other hand, focuses on how the “*Others*” have “talked” back within and against British constructions of their identities by studying examples of diasporic literature with a specific emphasis on new writing in the Black and Asian communities. A key question here is how these contemporary writers deal with the longing to belong and with the loss of “home”—when “home is where they already are? How do these creative artists present their own interpretations of the effects of displacement and its impact on articulations of faith, history, memory, subjugation, and nation? A major theme is how new identities are created, recreated, and refashioned as different experiences impact on one’s lives as well as—for a younger generation—through a more global trajectory.

The main course objective of the course is to study the ways in which postcolonial subjects in contemporary Britain seek to (re)present themselves through literature. The topic has numerous interpretative possibilities for the understanding of the power relations of creativity that are invariably played out in today’s Britain. It also lends itself to consideration of a number of issues raised through the texts that foreground race, racism, and ethnicity. We may also read these texts through the lens of authors who are of mixed-race and/or this is portrayed in the works.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Specifically for Study Abroad:

Demonstrate **awareness of your own cultural values and biases** and how these impact your ability to interact with others

Demonstrate **knowledge of diversity** with a focus on the population and/or topic of interest in your Study Abroad Program

Demonstrate an increased **capacity to analyze issues with appreciation for disparate viewpoints.**

Be able to **communicate appropriately and effectively** with diverse individuals and groups

Specifically for this Course:

- An understanding of the ways that literature reflects social realities and enhances our knowledge.
- Demonstrate an understanding of key creative texts that reflect specific issues relating to the formation of class, race, gender, and religious identities in Britain.
- Demonstrate an integration of this knowledge with the study location
- An encouragement of questions that challenge our previous assumptions and cultural values that lead to new insights and an appreciation of multiple viewpoints

Texts:

Black authors

Season of Migration to the North, Tayeb Salih **OR** *Nervous Conditions*, Tsitsi Dangarembga [both available on laulima]
Second-Class Citizen, Buchi Emecheta [available on laulima]
Girl, Woman, Other, Bernadine Evaristo [available on laulima and Hawaii libraries]

Asian authors

A Pale View of Hills, Kazuo Ishiguro [available on laulima]
Life of a Banana, P.P. Wong [need to purchase]

Criteria for Student Evaluation:* [Please note that as a **Writing Intensive** course there is a **required minimum of 16 pages or 4000 words**]. **Both oral and written feedback will be provided by the instructor on writing assignments.**

▪ attendance and participation in the class discussions (**10%**). After **three** absences, each one will result in a **5%** lowering of your grade. Both the instructor and the students are also expected to **be on time**. Three late entries are *considered an absence*, as is anything over 15 minutes after the start of class.

▪ two in-class presentations of **15 minutes each** on topics engaging issues that arise from the class and reading materials (**15%**). These will show an appreciation of how different issues (e.g., class, race, gender, generation) intersect and overlap with one another. Dates will be determined. Dates to be determined

▪ reading journals: weekly entries (minimum of one page) on the class materials and discussions (**30%**). These will assess your thoughtful and analytical reactions and how they may relate to your actual experiences in London as well as reflect your ability to interact and communicate effectively with others in a foreign setting; they will be collected and graded periodically. **Due Dates: Weeks 5, 8, 11**

▪ two 2 page “letters” to characters in the books read or to others (**10%**), to assess how well you comprehend and empathize with the key issues and dilemmas that the characters may face. **Due Dates: Weeks 3 and 7**

▪ final essay of 1000 words (c. 4 pages) that takes up several of the major themes addressed in the readings (**25%**). **Due: Week 12**

▪ one self-designed field trip (2 pages, may be with a partner) that will relate to some aspect of the Black/Asian experience in London (10%). Guidelines to be provided. **Due:**

**All percentages given are to be understood as general guides.*

Schedule

I. Introduction

Week 1: Introduction to Ourselves and the Class

Text: The Black and Asian Diaspora in Britain: changing patterns
BAME- Being Black and Asian Today,” current newspaper articles

II. Early Migrations: the colonized come “Home”

Week 2: A Colonized Identity

Text: *Season of Migration to the North*, pp.1-87

OR

Nervous Conditions, Introduction and pp. 1-104

Film: Selections from “*The Windrush Generation*”/” *Small Island*”

Assignment: **Due in Class: 2- page autobiography of self**

Week 3: *Season of Migration to the North*, pp 88-end

OR

Nervous Conditions, pp. 105-end

Assignment: **Letter 1**

III. Black Women’s Voices

Week 4: Making a Self and Struggling against Patriarchy

Text: Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, chaps 1-7

Week 5:

Text: Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen*, chaps 8-end

Film: “*Pressure*” or “*Burning an Illusion*”

Assignment: **Reading Journal 1**

Week 6: Black British Women Today

Text: Evaristo, *Girl, Woman, Other*, pp. 1-216

Week 7:

Text: Evaristo, *Girl, Woman, Other*, pp. 217-end

Assignment: **Letter 2**

III. Asian Diasporic Voices

Week 8:	A Japanese Woman's Story
Text:	Ishiguro, <i>Pale View of the Hills</i> , Part One
Assignment:	Reading Journal 2
Week 9:	
Text:	Ishiguro, <i>Pale View of the Hills</i> , Part Two
Week 10:	Coming of Age as a Chinese in Britain
Text:	Wong, <i>Life of a Banana</i> , pp. 7-138
Week 11:	
Text:	Wong, <i>Life of a Banana</i> , pp. 139-end
Assignment:	Reading Journal 3
Week 12:	Presentation of Final Essays/Discussion of Field Trips
Assignment:	Final Essay
TBA:	Course Wrap-Up and Get-Together

Grading Guidelines:

A work: outstanding work that demonstrates significant mastery of subject materials; i.e., shows analytical reading and critical engagement with conceptual issues.

Responds to questions (all parts)

Shows original thinking in presentation of own ideas

Excellent presentation; i.e., develops a focused and clear argument and articulates a sustained train of logical thought.

Pays attention to spelling and grammar.

B work: shows clear evidence of engagement with the materials as well as critical insight

Responds to questions (all parts)

Develops a focused and clear argument that proceeds logically (i.e., has a beginning, middle, and conclusion)

Very good standard of presentation

C work: shows some understanding of the key factual and/or theoretical issues and addresses them

Responds to question (all parts)

Reveals, in places, examples of a clear train of thought or argument

Concludes properly

Good standard of presentation

D work: * shows some awareness and understanding of the materials or theoretical issues, but with little development

Questions or parts are omitted

Misunderstandings are evident

Shows some evidence of planning, although irrelevant/unrelated material included

Fails to develop a clear or coherent response, but shows occasional knowledge or insight

F work: *fails to address materials or develop an argument; irrelevant response

Fails to address question

Fails to demonstrate knowledge of the key issues or arguments

Contains clear conceptual or factual errors or misunderstandings

Poorly organized/or poorly written

* I will make a special effort with any student who has borderline work and desires to improve upon it.

All percentages given are to be understood as general guides.

PLAGIARISM: This is a most serious academic offense and will be treated accordingly. It is defined as “to steal and use” the ideas or writings of another and pass it off as one’s own. Whether done *consciously or unconsciously*, appropriating others’ writings or language—without acknowledging the sources—is a legal offense (some universities may expel students who plagiarize). The act is not excused because of oversight, ignorance, or sloppiness. Plagiarism is considered a form of theft (of the work of others) as well as fraud (i.e., misrepresentation of others’ work as yours).

With the easy accessibility of the web, there is the real danger of being seduced by a “cut and paste” mentality. Learn from others—that’s fine; but be sure the final presentation and interpretation of ideas are your own. Anything you locate I can locate as well!!

Further information is available at the back of the University Catalogue. Don’t hesitate to talk to me if you are unsure about citing others’ work. Direct quotations must be indicated, paraphrasing must be acknowledged, and ideas taken from others must be attributed to their sources.

NEXT PAGE: ABOUT THE NOVELS

About the Novels:

Black Writers

Season of Migration to the North, Tayeb Salih (1966)

Tayib Salih was born in northern Sudan and emigrated to London to attend University. He held several positions and diplomatic posts and his last years were spent in Paris. This novel was written in 1966 and can be seen, along with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, as a classic novel of the impacts of British colonialism on Africa. Like Achebe's novel, Salih's is considered a great counternarrative to *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. However, instead of a western man going down the Congo, it is a Sudanese man going up the Thames.

The novel follows the narrator, an African man who returns to his village after studying in London and hopes to contribute to improving life in independent Sudan. There he meets a stranger among those he knew in his youth who tells him of his own years in London—his brilliant career, his relationships with European women, and the pain of returning to his native land. The meanings of his ill-fated relationships in the north (England) are a critical part of the book and question whether it is possible to establish relations of love with former colonizers.

Nervous Conditions, Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988)

The author's first novel, it was "was hailed as one of the 20th century's most significant works of African literature." It tells the story of Tambudzai, a girl raised in poverty in what was then called Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, and her fight to leave that poverty and obtain an education. In the process she faces challenges of multiple inequalities of gender, class, race, alongside the structures of her own society and that of the colonizer. inequality, Africa in the 1960s and '70s, and the postcolonial world.

Two decades before Zimbabwe would win independence and ended white minority rule, thirteen-year-old Tambudzai Sigauke embarks on her education. She feels the weight of the economic hopes of her parents, siblings, and extended family and. She yearns to be free of the constraints of her rural village. When her wealthy uncle sponsors her schooling, she thinks she's found her way out, however she soon learns that education at the mission school comes with a price.

Second-Class Citizen, Buchi Emecheta (1974)

Like many writers, their stories often follow experiences from their own lives. *Second-Class Citizen*, written in is no different and utilizes many of Emecheta's own life experiences. Born in Lagos, Nigeria of Ibo parents, she married while still a teenager, had two children while her husband went to study in London. She joined him, thinking it was for a short while, but ended up living there—all the while challenged by atrocious living conditions and a violent husband. She is considered a pioneer among female African writers, championing the rights of girls and women in her novels.

The novel tells of a Nigerian woman's struggles for education, to better herself, and against patriarchy as well as to survive as a single mother of five children in a racialized society.

***Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernadine Evaristo (2019)**

Evaristo's novel, her eighth, was published in 2019 and won the prestigious Booker Prize in England, becoming the first black woman and black British person to win it in its fifty-year history. Her writings focus on an interest in the African diaspora. She was born the fourth of eight children in southeast London to an English mother and a Nigerian father of Nigerian and Brazilian heritage.

This novel follows the lives of twelve very different people in Britain, predominantly female and black. Aged 19 to 93, they span a variety of cultural backgrounds, sexualities, classes, and occupations as they tell the stories of themselves, their families, friends, and lovers, across the country and through the years. Evaristo says of her writings: "As a storyteller, I like to mix things up temporally, spatially and stylistically – to cross the borders of genre, race, culture, gender, history and sexuality, most recently in *Girl, Woman, Other*."

Asian Writers

***A Pale View of Hills*, Kazuo Ishiguro (1982)**

Ishiguro moved from Nagasaki, Japan to England at the age of five, not visiting his birth country until 30 years later. Despite his deep knowledge of and long life in England, he maintains that his Japanese roots enabled him to see things differently from the English—as may well be the case for other children of immigrants.

A Pale View of Hills, written in 1982, is his first novel and the first of two that are set in Japan. The story is told in the form of memories that a middle-aged woman from Japan, now married and living in the English countryside, has of her first marriage and child there. Her story of a past friendship with a woman and her child, combined with present events in her life, create a tangled web of regret and guilt.

***Life of a Banana*, P.P. Wong (2014)**

Born in London of Chinese parents, originally from Singapore, Wong moved between London and Asia during her childhood, experiencing prejudice during her school years in the U.K. She began as an actress and is now a writer. *The Life of a Banana (like oreos and coconuts.)* is her first novel, written in 2014.