

Book Club

Book Club (Long Haul Journalism)

Overview

It is my experience that many students have had very little exposure to the kind of nonfiction reading and writing that this class asks you to do. As this is the case, I have tried to build in assignments that give you practice in both. This particular assignment gives you practice in *reading* literary journalism. Specifically, I hope you will learn how to trace the very complex and subtle arguments a journalist can make over the course of an article. This is a semester long reading project modeled around a book club experience. The emphasis is on reading, not writing, and on conversation about the reading.

Some reporters work for years on a single story. Sometimes they publish their writing on an on-going basis—*Breach of Faith* is an example of this. The origins of this book was newspaper coverage of Hurricane Katrina. Individual articles were then developed into a book-length piece on the events of the storm, the aftermath, and the legacy.

Unlike the majority of the articles that we will read this semester, the nuance of the argument these writers are making has had time to mature and develop. We don't, as writers in this class, have the luxury of time the way these folks do, but it is good to see the kinds of research—the depth of it, the idiosyncratic nature of it—that informs these stories.

Also, these books demonstrate how truth is far too often stranger than fiction, and should serve, in that way, as inspiration to you as writers.

Here is how book club will work:

At the beginning of the semester, depending on the numbers of students in this class, you will be put into book club groups.

As a group you will choose from a list of texts I have compiled.

From that point on, you will meet in class as listed on the schedule to discuss your book. You will have most of the semester to do the reading and it will be up to your group to determine how many pages you should cover for every meeting. I will briefly check in with each group during book club to see what progress you are making on the reading and clear up any concerns you might have.

Before you come to class for your book club meeting, it is your responsibility to respond to the prompt on the course blog regarding the reading you completed thus far. (see blog assignment sheet for more information regarding blogs) It will give you a chance to formulate your ideas about what the **thesis** of the book you are reading is, and **how the author is developing it**. It will also be a place to reflect on the **kinds of research** that have gone into the writing of this book. Finally, there will also be occasion to reflect on **the writer's journalistic/essayistic style**.

You'll spend book club meetings talking with each other about the book—about the issues that I mention above, your opinion of the book, etc.

At the end of the semester, you will be responsible, as a group, to present on your book to the rest of the class. The way in which you choose to present your information is up to you. Be as creative as you wish.

You will have 15 minutes to present. No more. Generally, you will be responsible for presenting the following information to your classmates:

- What the thesis of the book is and how the author developed it both from a research standpoint and from a structural (stylistic) standpoint.
- Your opinion of the book's journalistic and stylistic choices (a review of sorts)
- The opinions of other reviews on the book

Please see the schedule for book club dates, blog dates, and presentations.

How I will Evaluate Your Work/Presentation

I am using something called "spec" grading to evaluate and assign a grade for your essay draft. The grade is the result of quantity--or just doing what I'm asking you to do--and, quality in regards to your presentation. As explained in the syllabus, your work on this project is worth 10% of your grade.

In order to earn a "B" grade for that 10%

- You must read your book club book, write in class journals, and participate in group discussion
- Develop a presentation that responds to the prompt and is at least 13 minutes

In order to earn an "A" grade for that 10%

- You must read your book club book, write all in class journals that show thoughtful reflection in regards to the course material/discussions, and participate in group discussion
- Develop a presentation that responds to the prompt with depth and creativity that is 15 minutes

In order to earn a "C" grade for that 10%

- You must read your book club book, write most in class journals, and participate in most group discussion
- Develop a presentation that responds to the prompt but is less than 13 minutes

If you do not meet the requirements for a "C" project, you will fail the project for that 10% of your grade.