Writing with Folklore

Academic Writing I: Writing in Academic and Public Contexts

ENGL 160
Professor Eliza Marley

Fall 2025

Writing with Folklore

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Folklore is described as stories belonging to a specific culture or group of people detailing beliefs, customs, and tales of a community passed down through the generations. There are many stories which have been condensed and transformed over the years; repurposed to serve changing societies. Reading folklore can be a glimpse into the past, seeing how people practiced agriculture, crafted musical instruments, or understood their changing environments. Folklore is an asset for preserving the cultural legacies of groups all across the globe and reading these stories is a valuable tool for seeking to understand our current reality and the trajectory of social issues.

In this class we will be focused on writing development. We will use folklore, especially stories local to us in Chicago and on campus, as a framing tool for looking at the structural and stylistic components of different genres of writing and then translate those skills into our own projects. My hope is that as we go through this semester the stories we look at will be an enjoyable read and a helpful foil for our writing assignments.

LEARNING GOALS

1. Demonstrate rhetorical awareness of audience through different genre-based assignments.
2. Read texts in a variety of disciplines and genres, using critical reading strategies.
3. Draw connections at the level of ideas across multiple texts.
4. Defend a position in relation to the range of ideas surrounding a topic.
5. Demonstrate knowledge of writing as a process, including consideration of peer and instructor feedback, from initial draft to final revision
6. Demonstrate control over organization and sentence construction.

Integration with Hull-House Materials

(Content adapted from original course syllabus by Hull-House educators to reflect how materials were used for in-class instruction and assignments)

TOPIC 1: ETHOS, LOGOS, PATHOS, KAIROS

Prior to class, students will read "Hull-House and the 'Garbage Ladies' of Chicago." Instruction to be centered around identifying the four components of argument and discussing in small groups.

The guiding question of the class session is: What goes seen and unseen in the spaces we inhabit?

READINGS

- Hull-House and the "Garbage Ladies" of Chicago

TOPIC 2: BREAKING DOWN INTERVIEWS

Prior to class, students will read "I Discover Hull-House" from Hilda Satt Polacheck's memoir *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl*. Sample interview questions based on the essay will be drafted and discussed.

READINGS

- "I Discover Hull-House" from Hilda Satt Polacheck's memoir *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl*.

TOPIC 3: STRUCTURE OF ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

Prior to class, students will read Jane Addams' essay "The Devil Baby." Variations of the story as presented in the essay will be discussed before breaking down the structure, elements, and organization of the essay as well as its thesis and claims. Class will conclude with time for students to draft sample argumentative essays.

READINGS

- "The Devil Baby"

CLASS PROJECTS

Students will complete four projects over the course of the semester that could integrate Hull-House sources, along with others from the class, into cohesive applications of their learning objectives.

These included completing an audio walk (focus on comparative analysis skills), producing an interview and transcript (focus on interpretive skills and understandings of narrative form), writing an argumentative essay (focus on research communication skills), and a final reflection (focus on honing writing skills).

Sample Assignments

AUDIO WALK

Completing the walk - Walk around a neighborhood or campus for at least fifteen minutes. Record audio if you are able. Write about what you hear from passing conversation to city noise, ambient noise, nature, etc... What does this place mean to you / what is it "for" / what parts of it are you less or more familiar with?

Putting it in conversation - Compare your walk and what you heard to a story from the neighborhood where you were walking. Selection of relevant materials from Hull House to accompany.

Building close reading skills - One notable lesson learned, Haunted syntax activity, using excerpts of a story where an object is described but not named, use the words given to decode what is being described.

Putting it all together - What can be discovered by listening / reading closely. What is the relationship between writing and place?

DISCUSSION BOARD POST

For reflection halfway through semester - Have you uncovered anything about the place you're writing about that you haven't thought about before?

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