

Queer Theory, Queer Practice, Queer Teaching:  
An Exploration of and Experiment in Queer Pedagogy

Grant Havens Ryan King  
Chattanooga, TN

Bachelor of Arts in English, University of Tennessee at Knoxville, 2019

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the  
Degree of Master of Arts

Department of English

University of Virginia  
Spring 2021

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis would not have been possible without a great deal of help. Thanks to my colleagues, for their insights and encouragement; to my parents, Matthew and Renée Ryan King, and my brothers, John Hewitt and Maxwell, for their support; to Dr. Rita Felski, for serving as my advisor and for her indispensable direction, and to Dr. Brad Pasanek, for his guidance and counsel; to the students of my ENWR classes in the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021, for their feedback on my teaching and for everything that they are; to my friends and partners, for their patience as I wrote; and to the teachers I have had, and will have, who led me by example to the classroom, and who inspired the work that follows here.

### **Introduction: Queer Theory, Queer Practice, Queer Literature**

My life has been largely defined under the twin headings of studenthood and queerness. As far back as I can remember, I have been contextualized by the classroom; I learned how to traffic in academic spaces easily and early, and, in the awkward days of middle school and early high school, found myself more comfortable in the classrooms and library than I did in the formlessness of the hallways and lunchroom. The language of the academic world was one I knew how to speak, and one I was able to keep pace with as it changed from level to level and institution to institution; it was a comfort and a fluency.

My understanding of myself and my queerness evolved alongside and in response to my academic literacy. On the most basic levels, school offered me social interaction, which allowed me to recognize incongruities between others' expectations of me and my own experience of myself. In particular, the stories I read in English classes allowed me to see other potential ways of being, to peer into the lived experiences and realities of others, fictional and real, and imagine myself in many different ways from week to week. Despite the mitigation of these realities by the normalizing pressures of Education, (capital E, the system rather than the practice) I benefitted from them; the practice of discourse, of critique, of imagining, opened my mind up to my own queer potentialities. As I advanced into undergraduate English courses, I began to encounter queer theory, at first in the context of Shakespeare's plays and then in its own right. From Judith Butler, I read that gender is a performance; from Foucault, that countless systems constantly exerted normalizing pressure on their subjects in the interest of compliance and capital. My academic adventures bolstered my queer ones, which, in turn, encouraged me to read and study and research more; I was finding language for my own experience between book

covers, and discussing queer theory with friends while unpacking and deconstructing our own experiences.

As I read queer theory, and engaged with queer texts, I began to wonder where they were when I was younger. Throughout high school and early undergraduate school, I was confronting questions that queer theory could have helped me address, and so, too, were my straight and cisgender classmates. Though queer theory was never discussed (god forbid) in the classrooms of any of the high schools I attended, queer questions and thoughts filled the air--conversations about gender relations, of our school's focus on obedience and replication, of presentation and representation. We analyzed our favorite TV shows and postulated what tense glances between same-gender characters might have meant. We read Shakespeare in English and considered over lunch and at our lockers what it meant to crossdress, what it meant that we were moved by the idea of casting off one identity to wear another. The issues that queer theory takes up, issues of identity and belonging and pressure and normalization, of performance and dynamic and the future, were present in our minds, but without the language to do anything with them, they languished there, and, for many of my classmates, never went further.

As I considered this project, I wondered if I could construct something that could fill that void. What sort of a course could offer that language? The questions were there, the doors open, but only high school conjecture passed through them; what if that conjecture was not only allowed, but encouraged, made concrete, legitimized and offered life inside the classroom? What would a course look like that provided intentional, academic space for discussions of queerness in relation to literature, theory, and life, that validated the thoughts and experiences already at play as worthwhile pursuits and questions?

The course this project develops is an English class first--in the broadest terms, its aims are to hone students' skills in reading, critical discourse and thought, and writing. It is also, of course, a theory class--here, I mean that it aims to teach students the language of theory, and to offer readings of the forerunners of queer theory and opportunities to apply that theory to both life and fiction. There will obviously be instances of discussion of queer culture, but unlike David Halperin's "How To Be Gay 101," first taught at the University of Michigan in 2000, the course is not intended to be an initiation into the community (although if it has a similar affect, as an informative and welcoming space for young queer people in the process of self-discovery, I would not be disappointed, nor would my primary goals be undermined) (Halperin, 4). The goals of the course created here are as follows: to bring queer theory to a new group of learners--high schoolers--offering them the opportunity to engage with such concepts as gender as performance, society as normative, sexuality as enacted vs. identified vs. socially categorizing, etc.; to introduce learners to a wide range of queer texts from across time, identity, and genre, and to provide opportunities to analyze, contextualize, and discuss these texts; to deconstruct and disabuse students of the racist, homophobic, ableist, sexist, and classist tendencies of both English as a discipline and the education system at large; and to include assignments, activities, and lesson plans that are accessible, challenging, engaging, and, when necessary, discomfiting, in order to both urge critical thought and strengthen discursive skill.

In turn, the analytical portion will offer background and exploration, supported by both theory (queer and pedagogical) and experience (my own and that of others) to contextualize the decisions and moves made within the course itself. I first develop what queer pedagogy is, in its aims and formations, using Stacey Waite's *Teaching Queer: Radical Possibilities for Writing and Knowing*. This pedagogical practice informs the course materials I have created, which consists

of a syllabus, assignment sheets, (for discussion logs, reading reflections (called Inksheddings), both paper proposals, and both papers) and three sample lesson plans. I then analyze the syllabus I created for this course, focusing on the three portions which I think will best illuminate the ways in which queer pedagogy is at work in my class: first, I write a justification for my selected readings for the course--why I choose one work of Shakespeare's over another, why I challenge my students with theory, why I choose Lorde's biomythographical *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Wilde's classic *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, or Carson's abstract and intangible *Autobiography of Red*. Second, I elaborate on my choice to use labor-based grading, as developed by Asao B. Inoue in his *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom*. Third, I consider what participation looks like in a classroom committed to queer pedagogy, and discuss how I've decided, informed by the work of Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Preskill in their *Discussion As a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*. I also include a final section, for pieces of miscellany, including my approach to the creation of classroom behavior standards and my revision-focused assignment structure. Finally, my conclusion addresses the way this class would function in practice, particularly in a setting which doesn't welcome my often unexpected and new teaching practices, and endeavors to formalize answers to the questions at the forefront of this project: what does a course that offers queer theory and queer texts to students, at a high school level, look like? How does such a course use queer theory and pedagogy together to produce an experience for students that educates, provokes thought, and provides space and capacity for queer flourishing? The course and accompanying discourse that follows comes as an answer to that question, situated in and informed by theory that is queer, pedagogical, and pedagogically queer.

## Course Materials

### Statement of Teaching Philosophy

I believe that good teaching requires bravery. Sometimes students may ask difficult questions, challenge me or another student on beliefs or reactions to material, or find themselves struggling against an understanding they've held for perhaps their whole lives. As a teacher, I believe in reframing those tense or difficult moments not as mistakes, or moments to be avoided, but as opportunities for growth, on both my part and the part of my students. I want my classroom, and everyone in it—including, and especially, myself—to center bravery in our pedagogical philosophies. Though it might be called brave, I also believe it is simply and absolutely crucial to interrogate the ways in which teaching has upheld and enforced a structurally racist, classist, ableist, and oppressive system that focuses less on enriching students personally and academically and more on creating compliant and standardized future workers. Spurred by the understanding that education as we know it can and must change for good, my teaching prioritizes educating, challenging, and supporting students as we read, write, and discuss together, both for their growth and for the betterment of our world.

The first, and perhaps most obvious, goal of my teaching philosophy is to educate my students. I am, at my core, a teacher--students come to me to learn how to think critically, engage with texts, and communicate clearly, thoughtfully, and context-awarely, and filling those needs and desires is my first responsibility. My approach to education decenters me, as the instructor, and turns its focus on my students. I step in as the voice of authority only when necessary; I come to class with discussion questions and activities planned, but whenever possible, I let my students' reactions to our readings, their questions, concerns, agreements and disagreements, guide our discussion. My students do not raise their hands and wait to be called on; they learn the

rhythm of discourse and engage with our whole class, not just with me. When they struggle with a text, I adapt my schedule and my expectations, and spend more time on it, or add more readings to supplement their understanding, and when things come too easily, I encourage them to dig deeper into the nuances of a reading, or ask them to approach it differently. My lesson plans include very few lectures, and focus heavily on discussion, inquiry, and peer review; even grammar lessons and writing workshops are preceded by conversations and readings about race, class, and the risks of asserting one way to speak and write English.

Throughout my class, aided by my approach to power and authority in the classroom, students learn about more than the subjects we study together. They learn not just about Audre Lorde or Shakespeare or literary theory, but about interacting with and relating to one another, from big ideas, like negotiating tense moments in fraught and complex discussions, to small ones, like knowing how to give way in discussion when you and a classmate start speaking at the same time. This attention not only to academic success, but to personal growth, leads into my second priority: supporting students. As the ongoing pandemic has taught us, and continues to teach us, students under stress struggle to realize and reach their full potential as readers, writers, and scholars. There are a plethora of external forces, including unmet basic needs, issues accessing supplies and materials, mental and physical health concerns, and more, that impede a student's ability to get the most out of their education. As a teacher, I consider it a part of my responsibility to remove those barriers as much as possible, a responsibility that requires me to be inclusive, adaptable, and kind. I make it a point to learn as much about my students' lives outside of the classroom as they are interested in sharing, so that I can better understand any difficulties they might be encountering, and provide resources to help. Where I need to, I offer my students extensions and opportunities for revisions to ensure that one late or poorly formed



assignment doesn't discourage them from attempting to be their best. I also use contract-based grading, a concept popularized and developed by Asao Inoue in light of the understanding of grading, as the imposition of a single top-down standard onto student writing, as a white supremacist and classist issue, to encourage my students to be intrinsically rather than extrinsically motivated to create the strong writing I know they're capable of. More restrictive, punitive philosophies of teaching might argue that these support-oriented approaches allow students to 'get off easy' or encourage them to do shoddy work with an expectation of leniency, but I have found the contrary; my students understand my desire to support them as an investment in their success, and a sign that I believe in their potential and want to see it realized.

Supporting students without challenging them often breeds complacency in our teaching and their learning, and requires no bravery on their part or mine; similarly, challenging students without supporting them could be setting them up for failure, making them struggle with content or work alone. Pairing the two tells my students that I see the effort they're putting into our class, and the skills, talents, and ability they all have, and that I believe they can do even more and become even better. In my class, we challenge not only our abilities, but our preconceived notions of ourselves, others, the subject we learn together, and even what education looks like. By creating a class charter early in the semester that outlines expectations for discussion, sets a precedent for respectful disagreement, and allows us to establish what behaviors are and are not okay, we start from a shared, community-created ethical baseline that allows us to challenge ourselves and each other in a way still grounded in support. My classroom is a brave space, where we do not shy away from complicated, uncomfortable discussions of privilege and bias, or let ourselves be complacent and silent about our varied and complex positionalities. We also, of course, challenge ourselves to improve as scholars, understanding that writing, reading, and

learning are evolving practices in which even the most learned academic or groundbreaking thinker has room to grow.

I select the goals listed here as the chief guidelines of my course because I believe in teaching bravely. I cannot expect my students to take risks and be brave, to learn, to support and challenge themselves and each other, without doing so myself and setting an example; anything less would be unfair to us both. In the teaching I've been privileged to do thus far, the priorities outlined here have served me, and, most importantly, my students, well; we've been able to create classroom environments where students can challenge each other and discuss disagreements productively, can seek support from each other and from me, and can, most fundamentally, learn about themselves, our texts, and the world in which we live.

## Syllabus<sup>1</sup>

### **ENGL 1110: Gender and Sexuality in Literature and Theory**<sup>2</sup>

**MWF 12:00-1:20**

**Grant King (they/he pronouns)**

**Office hours: 2:00-3:00 or by appointment**<sup>3</sup>

#### **Table of Contents:**<sup>4</sup>

[Resources](#)

[Assignments](#)

[Grades](#)

[On Undocu+ Students](#)

[On Responsible Employee Status](#)

[On Plagiarism](#)

[Final Words](#)

[Course Schedule](#)

Welcome to ENGL 1110, aka Gender and Sexuality in Literature and Theory. Together, we'll pursue the usual skills you might expect from a high school English course (critical thinking, discourse and rhetoric, writing and communication, close reading) with added elements of gender and sexuality studies and queer theory. We'll use a few core questions to shape our thinking as we engage with our texts this semester:

- How do the texts we're using include gender and sexuality? Are the references to queerness concealed, are they obvious, or are they somewhere in between?
- Can the audience's engagement with a text take it in a queer direction? What impact does that audience engagement have on the text itself? What, if anything, can that tell us about how people read and relate to texts?
- What are the texts telling us about queerness and society? What biases do they reveal? What potentials and realities are they creating? How does society interact with gender and sexuality, in our current and lived reality?

---

<sup>1</sup> This syllabus is for an 11th grade English class, annotated with footnotes throughout to explain pedagogical decisions or to describe the institution in which the class takes place.

<sup>2</sup> This is the syllabus as it will appear on the first day of class--pacing and assignment due dates are subject to change to allow adaptability depending on variables like current events, student comprehension, etc. Secondary readings may also be added to respond to political and social events during the course of the class.

<sup>3</sup> Office hours may occur during planning periods or before or after school, depending on scheduling, and encourage students to communicate with me on concerns, questions, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Sections of the syllabus are linked here to encourage accessibility and navigability. Similarly, Arial is the default font for all course materials, as sans serif fonts are easier for those with low vision or dyslexia to read ("Font Face").

We can revisit, revise, and add to this list as we work through our readings together. We'll read all sorts of texts, both popular and classic, funny and solemn, novels, plays, criticism, theory, movies, and pieces that eschew genre altogether; as we do, we'll also be working towards the following objectives:

### **Reading**

- By the end of our time together, you will be able to--
  - Closely read a text, looking for elements like theme, tone, perspective, mood, genre, and form
  - Track the choices an author makes to establish a particular tone or achieve a particular goal
  - Apply secondary texts to primary texts and read them in light of one another
  - Compare and contrast differing texts
  - Comprehend literary terms of art like author's purpose, subtext, and context, and use them to enrich your understanding of a text
  - Think about audience engagement, yours and others, to see how it shapes and reshapes texts
  - Uncover and analyze queer potentials in texts, using criticism and theory

### **Writing**

- By the end of our time together, you will be able to--
  - Create literary analyses that work through issues within the text and make clear, persuasive, well-founded arguments
  - Use ideas like theme, tone, perspective, mood, purpose, subtext, context, etc, in your own writing to strengthen it and achieve your goals
  - Write creative pieces that draw on elements of a primary text, and develop personal responses and reflections that help you work through your feelings on a text and impart knowledge to the reader
  - Employ formal elements of writing, like standard academic English grammar, content conventions, etc.

### **Miscellaneous Objectives**

- By the end of our time together, you will be able to--
  - Use theory and criticism to think about texts, yourself, and the world
  - Participate in Socratic discussion and critical analysis
  - Incorporate feedback to improve your writing
  - Be aware of the various modes and locations of oppression and privilege that exist in our society today, and of how writing, reading, discussion, and language can solidify or fight them

- Know how to participate in academia and follow its conventions, while being able to critique those conventions

## Resources

While I'll have a few classroom copies of all texts we're reading in this class, if you have the means, I'd encourage you to obtain your own copy (whether that means finding a PDF online, checking it out from the library, or purchasing a copy)<sup>5</sup>! Especially if you're inclined to highlight, write notes and comments in margins, or otherwise annotate as you read (which I find extremely helpful!). If you anticipate having a hard time finding a copy of the text, and would like to use a classroom copy, let me know so I can make sure you'll be able to access the materials. If there are particular sources for the texts that I know to be reputable and reliable, I've included them below.

For certain texts, I'd like you to have a particular edition; this is particularly important in the case of Shakespeare's works and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, both of which have editorial interventions that are important to our reading. Where that information is important, I've included it in the list below.

For shorter readings, like excerpts, I'll be sending out PDFs/scans of the texts so you can read them on a device, and can print them by request as well<sup>6</sup>.

Our focus texts for this course are:

- *Twelfth Night*, William Shakespeare, Folger edition (available through the Folger's website [here](#) as a PDF)
- *The Uncensored Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde, edited by Nicholas Frankel
- *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Audre Lorde
- *Autobiography of Red*, Anne Carson

We'll also be reading criticism and theory, which you'll learn more about throughout the semester, and other shorter works--those listed above are the only ones we'll read cover-to-cover in our time together.

---

<sup>5</sup> Here, I'm assuming that the school may not provide texts for students--as I go on to mention, if students think purchasing their own texts will be a barrier to their access to the course, I will seek out ways, either institutional (school financial aid offices, libraries, etc.) or personal (scanning chapters, purchasing extra copies in addition to the classroom copies) to ensure that students will have our readings available to them. Classroom copies are also available in case students forget books at home.

<sup>6</sup> Printouts are available with students who have difficulties with screens because of low vision/chronic illnesses, or are not able to access computers from home, in mind.

## Assignments

**General Notes:** To turn your Inksheddings and papers in, please print them out! It makes it easier for me to comment on them, and cuts down on finicky formatting issues<sup>7</sup>. If you anticipate having a hard time printing things out, because of technical difficulties or lack of access to materials, please let me know, and we can discuss options and solutions. Any free-writes or other work we do in class can be handwritten and turned in on paper, or typed and emailed to me--whichever is easiest for you. Please use Times New Roman, Arial, all size 12, for your typed work whenever possible. You're also welcome to use a dyslexic-accessible font, like Dyslexie--just give me a heads-up ahead of time so I can make sure I'll be able to open your documents on my devices!

**Inksheddings:** Inksheddings are casual reflections on readings, one page maximum, double-spaced. I was introduced to Inksheddings by a professor of mine, Dr. Lisa King at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, who used them in her class--as a student, I found they really enriched my reading and discussion experience, and I hope they do the same for you! They can be critical or personal, as long as they address the readings and the content of our class.

On days we use Inksheddings in our class, you'll bring them in, typed and without your name on them--anonymity is an important part of the Inkshedding process. I'll collect your work and redistribute it to a classmate, who will read your writing and annotate it with their thoughts and responses; then, they'll all be handed back in, and I'll offer feedback. The point of this assignment is threefold: one, it gives you a space to synthesize your ideas and get ready for discussion; two, you all get practice in really informal peer review, before we do more formal work with our writing; and three, I get to read your ideas, see what's interesting you, and use that to shape and pace our course<sup>8</sup>.

You'll also notice that you'll be revising two of your Inksheddings as part of your final collection of work. I want you to get comfortable with revisiting and revising your writing, since it's such an important part of the process. Here, you'll be able to look back at two of your Inksheddings from the course of our semester and revise them; how deep of a revision you do is your call. You can either overhaul your whole argument based on a

---

<sup>7</sup> Subject to change if my institution doesn't have free printing available to students, to avoid barriers for those without access to printers--alterations may include students emailing in assignments for me to print using faculty resources.

<sup>8</sup> Learning goals of each assignment are shared with students here and on assignment sheets, both to encourage transparency and communication and to bolster students' understanding of the value and purpose of their labor.

change in your understanding of a reading--maybe your first Inkshedding expressed confusion and asked a question you now have the answer to, or took a position you no longer hold--or fine-tune your writing with changes to things like structure, word choice, etc. The intent of this assignment, in addition to helping you gain experience with revision and rewriting, is letting you see how much you've grown and evolved as a writer and reader over the course of our semester, and giving you an opportunity to incorporate feedback from me and your classmates (as much, or as little, as you think would benefit your writing).

**Due: August 23, August 30, September 4, September 13, September 20, September 22, October 4, October 9, October 18, October 25, November 15, November 22, December 11**

**Proposals 1 and 2:** Over the course of the semester, we'll be working on a course paper together. The prompt for this paper is very, very broad, so to make sure you're on the right track, you'll be writing proposals--one for the initial draft, and a second for the revision that you'll turn in as part of your final portfolio. These proposals will be one page in length, double spaced, and typed. We'll discuss the expectations a little more in class, and generate a rubric together, but what I'll be looking for in the proposals is really quite simple: a few sentences fleshing out what you'd like to argue, why you'd like to argue that and what it adds to the discourse, a run-down of evidence you'll be using (likely two texts, with a few quotes pulled out in the proposal and more in the paper itself) and any problems you anticipate running into. (Say, in the past, you've had a hard time with keeping the scope of your writing appropriately narrow--that would be a great concern to mention in your last portion). That last section is included so I'll be able to help you with those concerns as you write, and to watch for them in your paper itself.

**Due: September 30, November 11**

**Papers 1 and 2:** These are the papers the proposals prepare you for! 3-5 pages in length, double spaced, and typed, these papers are meant to help you explore texts, arguments, or themes that you're interested in from the course of our semester. Specifically, I'd like you to choose a theory or critical text we read and consider one of our pieces of fiction through that lens. This is left intentionally broad, because I want you to be able to choose something that will be engaging for you to read and write about. You can choose more than one fiction piece to discuss--say you want to write about both of Shakespeare's plays from our syllabus, for example. You can also, if you find it really compelling to do so, look outside of our syllabus for your theory/critical reading (but you'll need to be sure to clear that with me in your proposal first). As an example, you might choose to use the way Judith Butler writes about gender as performance to

explore Sybil Vane's acting career in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, or you might use Kimberle Crenshaw's writing on intersectionality to look at Lorde's experiences as a Black queer woman. We'll be able to address specific concerns and questions in class, and in your proposals, so don't consider yourself limited by what's written here.

**Due: November 1, December 18**

## Grades

You'll notice that the way our grades work in this class is a little different from classes you may have taken in the past, in that I'll be using labor-based grading to assess your work in this class. 'Labor-based' means precisely what it sounds like: I'll evaluate your work based on the labor you put into it, according to the table below. I do this for a few reasons: one, because grades, as we understand them--numbers that indicate the value of a thing--have a way of flattening your work as writers, and making you look for two or three digits at the top of a page instead of feedback on your writing. Two, because grades, as you might have experienced them before, create a top-down, autocratic approach to running a class, which I don't want to perpetuate here. Three, because traditional grading makes students extrinsically motivated, whereas I'd like you all to be intrinsically motivated by a desire to do well in our class. And four, because, as we'll discuss during the course of our class, there are certain racist, classist, sexist ideas that holding up and idolizing a single, standard English reinforces, and I don't want to do that in our classroom.

Hence, labor-based grading. Here's how it works: for each grade, you'll notice a series of conditions and expectations in the table below. If you want to receive an A at the end of our class, you'll need to meet the expectations listed in that row; same for B, C, D, etc. The work you complete will also need to be done in the spirit it is assigned--that is, I expect your best effort to be put forward each time and according to the assignment's prompt. Egregious failures to do so may require revisions, so please keep that in mind! Even though your writing won't be given a grade, you'll still get thorough feedback, and you have an opportunity to earn extra points as a result of exemplary work, as well--read on for more information on that. In the first week of our classes, you'll sign a contract with me electing to do the necessary work to earn the grade of your choosing. (We'll also hold conferences in the middle of the semester, in case you want to adjust your contract, or in case you're not holding up your end of the agreement).

**Non-Participating Days:** Generally, these are days on which you are absent. If you anticipate being absent particularly frequently--for example, if you have a medical issue, personal or family crisis, etc., let me know and we can discuss options. By default,



unexcused and excused absences function the same way: a mental health day and a doctor's appointment, for example, will both count towards your allotted number of absences. In extraordinary circumstances, a day on which you are physically present in class but are not participating may also count towards your allotted number of non-participating days.

**Late Work:** Work will be considered late if it is turned in any time after the due time, within a 24-hour window. Extensions, which will be granted in most cases provided you ask at least two weeks in advance, will move the due time accordingly. Note that this policy, and all the other late work policies, apply to all assignments equally--a late Inkshedding will 'weigh' the same amount as a late paper.

**Missed Work:** Work will be considered missed if it is turned in any time after the 24-hour late work window.

**Ignored Work:** Ignored work is work I never receive. Any amount of ignored work will earn a D or lower, as all the work we do in this class is important to your growth as writers and readers.

	A (4.0)	B (3.1)	C (2.1)	D (1.1)	F (0.0)
Non-Participating Days	3	3	4	4	5+
Late Work	2	3	4	5	5+
Missed Work	1	2	3	4	5+
Ignored Work	0	0	0	1	2+

**Exemplary Work:** I want to make sure that, when a piece of writing you produce is truly stand-out, exemplary work, that is reflected in your grade; I also want to give you an opportunity to make up for missed or neglected labor by putting forth extra effort in other areas. To do those things, I've given you the opportunity to earn points for really impressive, transformative, and noteworthy writing. If you turn in work that I find meets those high standards, you'll have the grade bracket you fall into based on your labor boosted by .4 points, to a B/C/D+. For example: say you have three nonparticipating days, three pieces of late work, two pieces of missed work, and zero pieces of ignored work. That puts you in the "B" grade category. Then, for one of your Inksheddings, you show a really phenomenal level of engagement and understanding of the text, and present a truly groundbreaking perspective. Your grade will then be bumped up to a B+. This is the only opportunity to get a '+' grade, and I'll be reserving it for particularly strong work.

## **On Undocu+ Students<sup>9</sup>**

All students are welcome in this classroom, including undocumented students, students from mixed-status families, and DREAMers/students with Temporary Protected Status. As an educator, I want to create a space that allows you all to thrive in this academic community; if your immigration status (or anything else, for that matter) is at all impairing your success in this course, you are encouraged to reach out to me, and we can discuss any accommodations you may need. Know that I will keep your status in confidence unless disclosure is demanded by a judicial warrant.

## **On Responsible Employee Status**

In my role at our school, I am considered a “Responsible Employee” when it comes to disclosing sexual or gender-based violence. That simply means that if a student comes to me to discuss their experience of sexual assault, harrassment, or rape at our school, I contractually must report it to the administration under Title IX. If you have something of that nature you feel the need to share with me, please take any desire for confidentiality you might have into account before doing so. For more about Title IX, click [here](#).

## **On Accessibility**

I want this course to be as accessible for all students, including those with disabilities, as possible. To that end, if you need accommodations, including printed assignments, closed captioning or video descriptions on content we watch in class, assistance in accessing websites we use, etc., please let me know. Some accommodations, like extra time on assignments or IEPs, may require additional administrative support or support from other faculty members, which I will be happy to help with as much as I can<sup>10</sup>.

---

<sup>9</sup> This section, “On Responsible Employee Status,” and “On Accessibility” may be enhanced by any institutional resources or policies. Even if the school does not have a formal policy on any of the above listed fronts, these sections will remain intact to make my course’s policy clear and to affirm those to whom the provisions in them may apply.

<sup>10</sup> Accessibility here refers to students with physical disabilities (like those who are Deaf or hard of hearing, those with low vision, etc.) and students with learning differences (like those with ADHD, autism, dyslexia, etc.). I am operating under the assumption that my institution has a faculty member, or group of faculty members, who operate similarly to disability services on the administrative level, creating or assisting with the creation of IEPs.

## On Plagiarism

If you have a concern about plagiarism in your work, or reason to believe that something in your writing might be considered plagiarism, please ask me before turning it in! Most of the time, as long as you appropriately cite your sources, you shouldn't have anything to worry about, but if you've encountered a grey area, let me know so I can help. I want to read your original thoughts, because they're valuable, and if that's not reason enough not to plagiarize, academic fraud can result in failure of the class or even, in extreme cases, expulsion from our school.

## Final Words

As your teacher, more than anything else, my goal is helping you achieve your personal and academic goals and reach your potential in this course. If there's something that feels like a barrier in the path of your success, please let me know; we will find a way to overcome it together.

## Course Schedule

**Wednesday, August 21:** Welcome to Class!

Reading due: none

Writing due: none

**Friday, August 23:** What is an identity? What is theory?

Reading due: none

Writing due: Inkshedding on yesterday's discussion

**Monday, August 26:** *Twelfth Night* pre-reading

Reading due: none

Writing due: none

**Wednesday, August 28:** *Twelfth Night*: performance, tragedy, and identity

Reading due: *Twelfth Night* Act 1, Scenes 1-3

Writing due: none

**Friday, August 30:** *Twelfth Night*: attraction and comedy

Reading due: *Twelfth Night* Act 1, Scene 4-Act 2, Scene 4

Writing due: Inkshedding

**Monday, Sept. 2:** Labor Day

**Wednesday, September 4:** *Twelfth Night* theory introduction

Reading due: "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Judith Butler, as PDF or printout upon request  
\*it's okay if you don't understand all of this on the first reading! I want you to try your best, even if you get confused or discouraged--don't be afraid to bring those feelings into your Inkshedding, too!\*

Writing due: Inkshedding

**Friday, September 6:** *Twelfth Night*: cruelty and masculinity

Reading due: *Twelfth Night* Act 2, Scene 5-Act 3, Scene 2

Writing due: none

**Monday, Sept. 9:** *Twelfth Night*: cruelty and masculinity, cont'd, plus theory

Reading due: *Twelfth Night* Act 3, Scene 3-Scene 4, *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam, pages 1-9, available as PDF or printout upon request

Writing due: none

**Wednesday, Sept. 11:** *Twelfth Night*: mistaken identity

Reading due: *Twelfth Night* Act 4, all

Writing due: none

**Friday, Sept. 13:** *Twelfth Night* conclusion

Reading due: *Twelfth Night* Act 5, Scene 1

Writing due: Inkshedding

**Monday, Sept. 16:** Writing Session: how do we write about *Twelfth Night*? About theory?

Reading due: none

Writing due: none

**Wednesday, Sept. 18:** Theory: Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

Reading due: *The History of Sexuality*, "Part One: We Other Victorians," Foucault

Writing due: none

**Friday, Sept. 20:** *Picture of Dorian Gray*: desire and class

Reading due: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Chapters 1-3, Wilde

Writing due: Inkshedding

**Monday, Sept. 23:** *Picture of Dorian Gray*: mimetics, morality, and performance

Reading due: *TPoDG*, Chapters 4-7

Writing due: none

**Wednesday, Sept. 25:** *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: camp, violence, and aesthetics

Reading due: *TPoDG*, Chapters 8-11

Writing due: none

**Friday, Sept. 27:** *The Picture of Dorian Gray* conclusion

Reading due: *TPoDG*, Chapters 12-13

Writing due: Inkshedding

**Monday, Sept. 30:** Writing Session: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Reading due: "General Introduction" and "Textual Introduction" from *The Uncensored Dorian Gray*, available as PDF and printout upon request

Writing due: Proposal 1

**Wednesday, Oct. 2:** Theory: E. Patrick Johnson, "Quare" Theory

Reading due: "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother," E. Patrick Johnson, available as a PDF and printout upon request

Writing due: none

**Friday, Oct. 4:** Theory: Kimberle Crenshaw, Intersectionality

Reading due: "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics [1989]," Kimberle Crenshaw, available as a PDF and printout upon request

Writing due: Inkshedding

**Monday, Oct. 7:** Theory: bell hooks, Black Feminism

Reading due: *From Margin to Center*, "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory," bell hooks

Writing due: none

**Wednesday, Oct. 9:** *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*: oppression and genre

Reading due: *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Audre Lorde, Chapters 1-5

Writing due: Inkshedding

**Friday, Oct. 11:** Fall Break--No Class

**Monday, Oct. 14:** Fall Break--No Class

**Wednesday, Oct. 17:** *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*: gender, race, and family

Reading due: *Zami*, Chapters 6-12

Writing due: none

**Friday, Oct. 18:** *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*: education

Reading due: *Zami*, Chapters 13-17

Writing due: Inkshedding

**Monday, Oct. 21:** *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*: community and legislation

Reading due: *Zami*, Chapters 18-23

Writing due: none

**Wednesday, Oct. 23:** *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*: language and identification

Reading due: *Zami*, Chapters 24-28

Writing due: none

**Friday, Oct. 25:** *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*: history and intersectionality

Reading due: *Zami*, Chapter 28-end

Writing due: Inkshedding

**Monday, Oct. 28:** *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* conclusion

Reading due: none

Writing due: none

**Wednesday, Oct. 30:** Writing Session: *Zami*, and Paper Questions

Reading due: none

Writing due: none

**Friday, Nov. 1:** Theory: *Fashioning Lives: Black Queers and the Politics of Literacy*: reading and writing in identity formation

Reading due: "Because of their Fearlessness, I Felt Empowered": Ancestors, Fictive Kin, and Elders," Eric Darnell Pritchard

Writing due: Paper 1

**Monday, Nov. 4:** Paper 1 Reflection: How was your first paper? What did you struggle with?

Reading due: none

Writing due: none

**Wednesday, Nov. 6:** Conferences--No Class<sup>11</sup>

Reading due: none

Writing due: none

**Friday, Nov. 8:** Conferences--No Class

Reading due: none

Writing due: none

**Monday, Nov. 11:** *Autobiography of Red*: genre and myth

Reading due: *Autobiography of Red*, Anne Carson, "Red Meat: What Difference Did Stesichoros Make?" to "Appendix C"

Writing due: Proposal 2

**Wednesday, Nov. 13:** *Autobiography of Red*: binaries and otherness

Reading due: *Autobiography*, 21-52

Writing due: none

**Friday, Nov. 15:** *Autobiography of Red*: the body and family

Reading due: *Autobiography*, 53-81

Writing due: Inkshedding

**Monday, Nov. 18:** *Autobiography of Red*: history and the nation

Reading due: *Autobiography*, 82-107

Writing due: none

**Wednesday, Nov. 20:** *Autobiography of Red*: metaphor and photography

Reading due: *Autobiography*, 108-146

Writing due: none

**Friday, Nov. 22:** *Autobiography of Red* conclusion

Reading due: *Autobiography*, 147-149

Writing due: Inkshedding

**Monday, Nov. 25:** Thanksgiving Break--No Class

**Wednesday, Nov. 27:** Thanksgiving Break--No Class

---

<sup>11</sup> Class on Nov. 6 and 8 is cancelled to allow all students the opportunity to attend conferences and discuss their papers with me; asking students to meet with me after or before school may present a barrier to those who work, care for family, or have limited transportation options. If cancelling class is not allowed, the periods will function as study halls for students not actively conferencing with me, in which they may work on assignments for this or other classes, read, etc.

**Friday, Nov. 30:** Thanksgiving Break

**Monday, Dec. 2:** Writing Session: focus tbd, based on papers<sup>12</sup>

Reading due: none

Writing due: tbd, based on focus

**Wednesday, Dec. 4:** Writing Session: focus tbd, based on papers

Reading due: none

Writing due: tbd, based on focus

**Friday, Dec. 6:** Writing Session: focus tbd, based on papers

Reading due: none

Writing due: tbd, based on focus

**Monday, Dec. 9:** Peer Review Session

Reading due: none

Writing due: part of Paper 2 for peer review

**Wednesday, Dec. 11:** Concept review

Reading due: none

Writing due: Inkshedding

**Friday, Dec. 13:** Peer Review Session

Reading due: none

Writing due: revised section from Monday

**Monday, Dec. 16:** Theory: Muñoz, futurity

Reading due: *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, "Stages," José Muñoz, available as PDF and printout upon request

Writing due: none

**Wednesday, Dec. 18:** Exams--No Class

Writing due: Paper 2

**Friday, Dec. 20:** Exams--No Class

---

<sup>12</sup> These writing sessions will address common areas of improvement for my students' writing, based specifically on those I see occurring frequently in their papers. Potential topics may include structuring a paper, structuring a sentence, word choice, using quotes, creating citations, forming an argument, effective conclusions, effective introductions, etc.



## **Assignment Sheets**

### **Discussion Logs**

Once a week, you all will be asked to write discussion logs. These let you assess your participation in our class, and tell me how you think you're doing. Every discussion is unique, as is every student's participation style; that means that rather than enforcing a single standard for what 'participation' looks like, I want you to tell me how you each think you're doing.

**Labor Expectations:** To get credit for this assignment, you'll need to spend at least 5 minutes at the end of class writing down your responses to these questions. Please answer honestly and thoroughly, so that both of us (you and I) will get the most out of this assignment.

The questions will be posted on the board at the end of every Friday, and you'll write your answers to each either on paper, which you'll hand to me on your way out, or into an email, which you'll send me before you leave class for the day. The questions are:

- 1) How do you think you contributed to our classroom community this week?
- 2) What was an insight you shared with us, either in writing or in discussion, that you're proud of?
- 3) What was an insight that was shared with you, either in writing or discussion, that you think the sharer should be proud of?
- 4) What are your goals for contributions for next week? Is there anything you'd like to do differently? More? Less?

## Inksheddings

Inksheddings are what we'll call your reading responses in this class. I first encountered them in an English class when I was in undergraduate school, and I liked them so much that I'm passing them onto you all now. These assignments are reading reflections and peer review practice simultaneously, but they're very straightforward! They'll also be anonymous, to encourage you all to be honest with each other

**Labor Expectations:** To get credit for this assignment, you'll need to read the text for the day on which your Inkshedding is due, then sit down and write about a page, double spaced, of reflection on the text. These need to be intimately connected to the reading: you can ask questions, argue with the author, talk about the reading in context of something we've read or discussed in the past, bring in current events, or share personal insights and experiences here. You're also encouraged to quote from the text in your Inksheddings! If you're confused about some part of the reading, this is the perfect place to say that, and to try to write yourself through your confusion. Since your classmates are reading these, it might be wise to keep in mind what you do and don't feel comfortable disclosing.

Writing these can take anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour, depending on the content you choose to write about and the level of the readings in question. When the Inkshedding is due, please bring it to class typed and printed, without your name on it--instead, write your student ID number somewhere on the page. You'll hand your work to me, and I'll shuffle your papers, then redistribute them. You and your classmates will spend about five minutes making written comments on each others' work, both about content and about the mechanics of the writing itself. Don't comment on grammar or punctuation, though; focus on other pieces, like word choice, structure, or strength of argument.

After you've commented on each others' work, you'll write your student ID number on the Inkshedding you read and return it to me. Note that the comments are an important part of the Inkshedding process; to get credit, they should be thoughtful and thorough. Once the Inksheddings have been collected, we'll start our discussion for the day, in which you're encouraged to bring in pieces from the Inkshedding you read, or the one you wrote yourself.

## Proposals 1 and 2

We'll spend the whole semester working on a single paper, to give us plenty of time to really develop our ideas and arguments. Before you start work on your papers, though, you'll be writing a proposal--once before your first draft, and once before your revision. I ask you to write these proposals because they give both of us peace of mind that you're going in the right direction with your paper. These are a space for you to work out your ideas and plan, and to tell me what concerns you have--like almost all of the work we do in this class, they're meant to help you meet your learning goals!

**Labor Expectations:** To get credit for this assignment, you'll be writing a page to two pages, double spaced and typed, on what you plan to write your semester-long paper about. The first of these two proposals will include three key parts: one, a description of your argument, two, a layout of your general argument structure including your evidence, and three, any issues you anticipate running into. The third component could include a wide range of responses; maybe you're concerned about your word choice, or you're not sure how to structure a paper. Maybe you tend to write too much, or too little. Whatever the case may be, I'll use that information to help me understand what you might need to work on before I read your paper, and can also tailor our writing classes to address common concerns.

In your second proposal, I'd like you to use the comments I made on your papers and the things we discussed at your conference to make a plan for your revision. Here, you'll describe things that you felt you needed to work on in your first paper, and how you'll improve in your revision. That might look like substantially changing your argument, or moving pieces around; it might also look like focusing on sentence-level writing, word choice, or any number of other arenas of writing. Specificity is important here--how will you grow as a writer here? What steps will you take throughout the writing process to reach your potential? You'll also describe any issues you anticipate encountering, and, finally, you'll tell me one thing you think you did well in your first paper. This can be anything, from a specific sentence you're proud of to the strength of your argument in general. As we work on our writing, it's important that we see not only the areas of improvement, but those in which we're already adept, as well!

Both of these proposals will likely take about an hour to an hour and a half to complete.

## **Paper and Revision**

Throughout the semester, we'll work together on one single paper. You'll write two drafts of this paper: a first draft, due at around midterm, and a revision, for your final. The prompt for this paper is intentionally very broad, because I want you to be able to write about something that is genuinely interesting to you. If you're struggling to come up with a topic, don't worry: I can help you generate ideas based on what you're drawn to. You can pull paper ideas from your Inksheddings, or from our discussions in class.

**Labor Expectations:** To receive credit for the first draft of your paper, you'll write 3-5 pages analyzing, critiquing, or otherwise engaging with one or more of the texts we've read this semester. You should be including quotes from the text or texts whenever it enriches your argument (at least once; very, very likely more than that) and citing them parenthetically and on a Works Cited page according to the MLA format we discuss in class. We'll talk more during our writing sessions about what effective papers look like, so we can construct our expectations together. The paper should be turned in on time, typed and double-spaced; it will likely take anywhere from five to twelve hours to complete, not including reading and pre-writing, the latter of which we'll do in class. I encourage you to allow more time for this than you think you'll need; don't rush yourselves!.

To receive credit for your revision, you'll take the feedback we generate on your paper and use it to edit and improve your work. These changes will likely be substantial--more than moving a few words or commas around. Since revision is a crucial part of writing, and the source of your evolution as writers, I'm asking you to take this step seriously; I want to see growth from your first draft to your revision. This will look different for everyone, based on their strengths and areas for improvement as writers, so don't compare your work to the work of those around you. For that reason, it's also tricky to estimate how long the revision will take; allow yourself more time than you think you'll need, with a baseline of at least three hours.

## **Lesson Plans**<sup>13</sup>

### **Sample One: First Session Lesson Plan**

12:00-12:20: Welcome to Class!

- introduce self, very general course outline
- icebreaker/introduction for students: what animal of x ecosystem is your 'familiar'?
- let students choose the ecosystem based on familiarity/interest

12:20-12:40: Syllabus Overview

- look at texts and assignments, as well as the first two weeks of class
- pause frequently for questions

12:40-1:00: Grading Contracts

- go over grading contract piece, thoroughly and slowly--give plenty of time for questions and concerns
- tell students to write down on a piece of paper, to hand in at the end of class, their name and goal grade (use this to monitor when a student might need help, when they might be struggling, etc, based on their goals)

1:00-1:20: Starting Course Material: What Is an Identity?

- how do you identify yourself? By race? Gender? Socioeconomic status? Likes, dislikes, hobbies? Why?
- encourage discussion, set precedent for stepping out of intermediary position as instructor

1:20: Class Ends--collect goal grade slips as students leave

---

<sup>13</sup> This approach to lesson planning is influenced by Linda Enow and Andrew Goodwyn's "The Invisible Plan: How English Teachers Develop Their Expertise and the Special Place of Adapting the Skills of Lesson Planning," which suggests that the more expert the teacher, the less scripted the lesson plan. These lesson plans follow a model I developed in my ENWR teaching experiences, which allows me to have a sense of how much time each component should take and what needs to be done in the course of a given class without feeling restrictive. In my experience, very thorough lesson plans undercut my ability to respond to student reactions; the structure used here allows for flexibility while still providing an outline for the day's class.

## **Sample Two: Discussion Session (Friday, August 30th)**

12:00-12:15: Welcome!

- Collect any due work
- Encourage questions about housekeeping (i.e. things like conferences, future assignments, administrative things like fire drills or field trips) (please hold questions about next class until the end of the session!)
- Lay out plan for the day in broad strokes

12:15-12:30: Choral Reading

-To situate ourselves in the text, we'll do a little choral reading before we get started with our discussion. Starting at Act 1, Scene 5 of *Twelfth Night*, line 175 in the Folger online edition, we'll divide the class in half: half will read for Viola/Cesario, half for Olivia. Students will move to stand or sit with their respective groups, and read through the scene until Malvolio enters (line 305).

12:30-1:20: Discussion Begins

-Students will be asked to generate their own discussion questions--after five minutes of thinking, we'll go around the room, seated in a circle, and each student will share a discussion question they'd like to bring to the group. Duplication is okay; after each question, the student will say a few words about potential responses to the question

-During the discussion itself, students will be asked to only respond to the discussion questions of their peers--not their own question (per the "Circle of Voices" in Preskill and Brookfield's *Discussion As a Way of Teaching*, 78-81)

-Backup discussion questions, in case those shared by students don't get at our aims for the day, include:

- how is attraction working in this scene?
- what is Viola/Cesario doing in this scene? How are they performing? What roles?
- what is Olivia doing in this scene? How is she performing? What roles?
- what is the effect and affect of this scene?
- how is identity at work here?

1:20: Class Ends--collect Discussion Logs as students leave

### **Sample Three: First Peer Review Session (Monday, December 9)**

12:00-12:15: Welcome!

- Collect any due work
- Encourage questions about housekeeping (please hold questions about next class until the end of the session!)
- Lay out plan for the day in broad strokes

12:15-12:30: Why Peer Review?

- What is peer review? How does it work and why do we do it?
- What experiences have we had with peer review before? Good, bad, ugly?
- What makes good peer review? What is helpful or unhelpful? How does our labor enrich our classroom community and help us reach our learning goals?

12:30-1:10: Peer Review Time!

- Go over peer review plan (below), ask students their thoughts, respond to questions
  - Plan will be posted on board for students to read throughout class
- After questions are answered and all are on the same page, get started
  - Play music during session, depending on consensus, so students can focus
  - Stay out of students' way throughout; encourage flags for questions
  - Run timers (5 minutes, then 30 with a reminder at 15) so students will know where they stand on time

1:10-1:20: Debrief

- How did you think that went? What worked? What didn't? What should we do differently next time?
- Look forward to next class--reiterate any due work, readings, etc

## Peer Review Guide

1. **5 Minute Free-Write:** In the Google Doc with your content, write an author's note. You can use informal language if you'd like! You can think about things that were difficult about writing your paragraph, or things that came easily to you. Make sure to include any concerns you have about your paragraphs, so your reader can know what to look for!
2. **Peer Review Phase 1--Read:** Choose a person from your group and read their paragraphs (make sure everyone's paragraphs have a reader!). As you read, use the comment function to draw attention to things you like about the paper (good word choice, engaging language, strong evidence, etc.) and areas about which you have questions (unclear words, confusing sentences, etc.)
3. **Peer Review Phase 2--Respond:** In a different color than the original text, below the paragraphs and author's note, respond to the following prompts.
  - a. Find the author's thesis and copy and paste it. If you're looking at multiple body paragraphs, find the thesis statement of each paragraph. If you're only looking at one paragraph, find the thesis of that paragraph. Write a brief sentence or two describing if you think the thesis/theses are strong, and if you think the paragraphs you've read follow the thesis.
  - b. Identify the different parts, purposes, and complexities of the paragraphs you've read. The parts could be paragraphs, or the sentences within a single paragraphs. Write a sentence or two about each part, its purpose, and any complexities that might exist--in the relationship between each paragraph, for example, or between sentences. Remember that the words "complexity" or "complex" might have negative connotations, but here, we're using them neutrally--it's okay for an idea or a paragraph to be complex as long as the author does their best to make it understandable!
  - c. Respond to the sources or evidence the author uses. For each one, write a sentence or two about their effectiveness. Do they convince you? If they use quotes, are the quotes effective?
4. **Peer Review Phase 3--Discuss:** Finally, discuss your comments with your group. Share a piece of praise you have for the content, and a question you might have about them that will lead the author to strengthen their writing. If there's time, you can develop those ideas more, or continue talking about how you felt about peer review today.



## Analysis

### What Is Queer Pedagogy?

As Stacey Waite addresses in *Teaching Queer: Radical Possibilities for Writing and Knowing*, existing thinking about queer pedagogies tends to be bound to LGBT+ subjects, be they students or teachers, to LGBT+ literature, and, when in reference to writing, to content (5). Essentially, queer pedagogy is considered something enacted primarily by queer instructors or students, in reference to queer texts and queer writing. While these attachments are often constructive, they are not the end all and be all of queer pedagogy's potential. After all, queerness, by its nature, resists categorization and binding. In my course, students will engage largely with literature that is, so to speak, 'out'--that is attached to queer subjects, either in the form of author or character. I recognize that this decision could be seen as limiting, as it may lend itself to the belief that queer pedagogy is only facilitated through queer texts. I make it, however, for a few reasons--one, to hopefully ease my students' understanding of the often tricky queer theory texts we read by giving them concrete instances for clear analyses, and two, to open doors of representation, as Andre Cavalcante discusses in his *Struggling for Ordinary: Media and Transgender Belonging in Everyday Life*, offering a "kaleidoscope of possible selves and life itineraries" to my students, queer and otherwise (120).

As the readings for this course adhere closely to the attachment between queer content and queer pedagogy, I take extra care to sever the other two bindings Waite invokes, of queer pedagogy to personal subject and to content of writing and writing instruction. The queer elements of my course go far beyond the texts on the syllabus--I invoke queer pedagogy in, as Waite writes, "methodologies or approaches to teaching *and* to writing," rather than creating a

course with queer readings that goes on to enforce normative pedagogical standards (i.e. strictly standard English, traditional and standardized grading systems, centralized classroom power).

In their 2015 video essay, “The Failure of Queer Pedagogy,” Jaqueline Rhodes elaborates on the concept of queer pedagogy, problematizing whether or not one can actually practice pedagogy queerly. Rhodes draws attention to the cognitive dissonance between queer aims and the aims of, as they put it, “capital ‘P’ pedagogy”--

Can such a thing as queer pedagogy even exist? For pedagogy is about disciplining the subject. Pedagogy is a heterosexed political indoctrination in service of a heterosexed institutional imperative. The queer challenges such disciplining, such assimilation, and resists the demarkation of acceptable and unacceptable, appropriate and inappropriate. There can be, and are, queer teachers. There can be, and is, queer teaching. But queer teachers teaching queerly still struggle against the confines of capital “P” pedagogy, which is informed by a logic of mastery, of individual attainment, and of institutional assessment.

Here, Rhodes unveils the ways in which queerness and pedagogical aims are at loggerheads: queerness resists evaluation, and, when evaluated in a qualitative context, often fails, as Jack Halberstam writes in *The Queer Art of Failure*. Pedagogy, in the capital “P” sense, exists *to* evaluate, and to center the priorities and ideals of the evaluator. How, then, can queer Pedagogy exist? Rhodes’ answer is that it cannot--the institutional ties of Pedagogy are dyed in its wool, and queerness, for all its ferocity, cannot bleach them away. Instead, Rhodes argues for a *queering* of pedagogy, “a verb rather than an adjective...an imperative: Go forth and queer pedagogy.” Rhodes further suggests that the joy, “the energy,” of queer teaching are derived from the sense of failing at Pedagogy; failing, as the instructor, to be the center of attention, failing to

impress normative, heterosexed, patriarchal, white, capitalist standards onto students. They frame queer teaching as a space of possibility, potential, capacity, echoing authors like Cavalcante, in reference to representation, or Muñoz, to futurity. The failure queer teaching embodies is not itself a failure to teach, but, as Jack Halberstam writes about failure at large, a “(refusal) to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline...as a form of critique” (88).

To truly teach queerly, then, I must carefully assess my language and priorities: when invoking the idea of pedagogy, what do I mean? (Here, I mean the practice of what Rhodes implies is ‘lowercase-p’ pedagogy--simply the desire to teach, or, more specifically, to help learn, outside of and even in opposition to those heterosexed, white, patriarchal, capitalist systems Pedagogy would enforce.) Am I, as an instructor, ready to ‘fail,’ according to the yardstick of institutional pedagogy? (Yes--I believe the failure Halberstam describes above is the only way to teach effectively, as it centers the critical discussion so often touted as a course goal not only in the content but in the pedagogical approach itself.) Returning to Waite’s acknowledgement of the false binding of queer pedagogy to queer subjects, I feel it important to acknowledge that any student can be taught queerly, just as any teacher can teach queerly, as long as they are prepared to endure the consequences of challenge and discomfort that come with this transformative ‘failure.’

### **Readings, Challenge, and Representation**

The course I’ve created is intentionally designed to challenge my students, in keeping with one of the tenets of my “Statement of Teaching Philosophy” (6-9). With that in mind, I chose texts that will ask them to reach and push in one way or another--whether in the writing itself, as with *Twelfth Night* or *Picture of Dorian Gray*, or in the content, context, or form, as with *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* or *Autobiography of Red*. The goal to challenge my

students caused me to select these readings, not the other way around; this kind of syllabus design allows for more transparent pedagogy that better foregrounds what I want my students to get out of the class. As I write in my “Statement of Teaching Philosophy,”

My classroom is a brave space, where we do not shy away from complicated, uncomfortable discussions of privilege and bias, or let ourselves be complacent and silent about our varied and complex positionalities. We also, of course, challenge ourselves to improve as scholars, understanding that writing, reading, and learning are evolving practices in which even the most learned academic or groundbreaking thinker has room to grow. (9)

The challenges these texts present come from their ideas as much as they do their sentence structure, genre, or word choice; they ask students to do the very things I write about in the quote above, thinking deeply about their positions in the world and what they believe or have been told is true or right, while also provoking growth as readers and writers.

Perhaps the best example of the synthesis of these two areas of challenge is in the theory readings I assign. Some are more straightforward than others--I imagine that students will take to Muñoz’ descriptions of spaces and stages more easily than they will to Foucault, for example--but all will likely be content my students haven’t seen before. I absolutely anticipate, too, that they will struggle with it. They may not ‘get’ any of the authors on the first pass; I do not expect them to. I verbalize that expectation on the syllabus, as a note under our first theory text reading (Butler’s “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory”): “It’s okay if you don’t understand all of this on the first reading! I want you to try your best, even if you get confused or discouraged--don’t be afraid to bring those feelings into your Inkshedding, too!” This reframing of what success in reading looks like--from

a mode that prizes immediate understanding (and simultaneously discourages challenge, growth, and intellectual labor) to one that encourages work and defangs failure and struggle as the worst possible results of engagement with a text--is influenced both by Waite's work on queer teaching and Asao B. Inoue's work on labor (which is developed further in the following section, "Labor-Based Grading and Antiracism"). Both authors encourage the abandonment of traditional models of success; Waite draws heavily on Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* to suggest that falling short of the expectations of Pedagogy, as heterosexed and patriarchal, is a fundamentally queer act, while Inoue prioritizes labor as the location of learning. In my course, when students are challenged by a difficult text, my aim is to make them aware that that is more than okay--that struggling is where the important intellectual, personal, social development we are pursuing occurs (per Inoue), and that the idea that one should fully and intimately understand something the first time they read it is reductive at worst and stagnant at best (per Waite).

There is a second, perhaps less surprising, reason that I selected these specific texts and authors for this syllabus: representation. That word is so often bandied about in modern pedagogical contexts that its potential for radical effect has been overshadowed, but I hope to realize it in my class. My students encounter Black, queer, female, and Latine authors and characters throughout, a fact which I do not consider an achievement; ideally, such a range should be so commonplace that it is taken for granted. In the current reality, though, the value of representation in reading cannot be taken for granted. In his *Struggling for Ordinary: Transgender Belonging in Everyday Life*, Andre Cavalcante writes that representations of queer existence offer readers "kaleidoscope of possible selves and life itineraries" (120). Cavalcante then goes on to present a range of case studies in which queer individuals realize some component of their identity through an encounter with media of all types, from comics to

television and beyond. It follows that that same realization should be possible through literature; perhaps, when a student reads about Audre Lorde's relationships with other women, or Geryon's exploration of his own perceived monstrosity, or Butler and Muñoz and Halberstam on the expansive potential of gender and identity, they may encounter what Cavalcante calls "possible selves...North Stars that guide individuals" and "spark action and incite the work of self-making" (99). These "possible selves" benefit queer students, as they may recognize themselves within a character or author, and nonqueer students, as they are alerted to other ways of being outside their own experience and given the opportunity to empathize with those others, alike.

Similarly, Eric Darnell Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives: Black Queers and the Politics of Literacy* takes up representation as it applies to Black queer individuals and experiences. Pritchard describes two kinds of literacies: literacy normativity, which "refers to uses of literacy that inflict harm," and restorative literacies, which are employed by Black queer people "as a means of self-definition, self-care, and self-determination" (24). Literacy normativity manifests in many ways, from what historian Harvey Graff calls the "literacy myth," which suggests that education alone can solve economic disparities, to the policing of the language of young Black and Latine individuals in schools, to, indeed, the absence of authors or characters of color on syllabi and classroom libraries across the country (24). That use of literacy is what I want to work to avoid in my classroom, both in terms of evaluation and in terms of representation; luckily, Pritchard's alternative, restorative literacy, exists. Restorative literacies allow Black queer people to "repurpose literacy to thrive despite attempts to use it as a tool of domination by others," an indication and manifestation of Black queer resilience (33). Restorative literacies are not only reactionary, though; Pritchard takes care to draw attention to the fact that such a positioning only intensifies the normative, white, heterosexed framing of Black queer literacy. I

realize, because of my own identity as a white person, that I cannot enact restorative literacy for my Black queer students as Pritchard describes it; I see my role, instead, as offering students the opportunity to enact it on their own, to support them as they do so, and to legitimize what Pritchard calls their “cultural labor,” leveraging my position as a white person, a teacher, and a white teacher to provide circumstances in which these important restorative literacies can take place (33). I do this by encouraging restorative readings, not only of the obvious texts--those written by Black queer people or about Black queer experiences--but of all texts. Just as Stacey Waite writes that queer teaching is not limited to queer texts, restorative literacy for Black queer people is not limited to Black queer texts; its reach is as far and as wide as the literary world. Restorative literacy can be applied to any text, from Shakespeare to Anne Carson, in the interest of furthering Black queer liberation, and in my course, I not only allow, but invite and support, this important work and thinking

My text choices prioritize not only representation of identities, but of different historical moments and genres. The syllabus for my course includes plays, novels, literary theory, prose poetry, and biomythography, ranging in chronology from *Twelfth Night*, first performed in 1602, to *Autobiography of Red*, published in 1999 (“Twelfth Night”). The decision to cast such a wide temporal and generic net was intentional; I chose texts that showcase an array of perspectives and portrayals of queerness, ways of writing, purposes, etc., because I want an expansive archive for my students and myself to work with. Of course there is merit in classes that only focus on Shakespeare, or contemporary literature, or the novel. Such classes can be useful for a deep dive into a single author, or time period, or genre; the purpose of my class, however, is to give a broader view of the literary world. The range of texts we read also allows my students to be prepared for future encounters with literature and writing. They will leave my class not only

having encountered one shelf in the library, so to speak, but instead will have engaged with a carefully curated selection from the whole catalog.

### **Labor-Based Grading and Antiracism**

Grading is one of the things that I feel is the most important to get ‘right,’ and one of the trickiest. I want my grading system to reflect my course’s overall ethos of queer pedagogy: against hierarchy, against racism, against all the things capital-P pedagogy stands for. Standards-based grading, the default model which evaluates students on whether or not they achieve certain standards, upholds those very oppressive values. When an instructor grades based on standards, they make up a rubric by which to assess their students’ work. This rubric, at its worst, prizes white, colonialist, classist English; at its best, it ignores the issues of race in language, but likely still retains an allegiance to white English as correct or quality. Asao B. Inoue, in his *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom*, describes this standard of grading as a “White *habitus*” which demands that students become docile, and submit to white supremacist language standards to succeed in classes and, essentially, get good grades (55). After the instructor makes up their rubric, which they may or may not formalize in writing, and which they may or may not share with their students, they read the work students turn in and hold it up against that rubric. If they are holding stringently to the “White *habitus*,” they will mark off points for AAVE, improper subject/verb agreement, misplaced commas, missed capitalization. They will mark off if the work is too short or too long. They will mark off if the student uses ‘I’ or ‘we.’ They will mark off if they use contractions. If they included on their rubric a number of points to deduct for each infraction, they will do so; that number of points is, of course, subjective, as they decide how severe each offense is. If they have not tied each issue to a point value, they may mark off



different amounts on different students' work, or on the same students' work on different days. They will assign a number value to the work--89? 90? 91?--that is meant to reflect the students' performance, but that may not be based on anything more than a sense of how serious grammar mistakes are. Once the number is assigned, the work is graded, and they will move onto the next student.

As a teacher, it's easy to imagine that, despite the fact that the system itself is full of racism and Foucaultian normalization, if you just try hard enough, you can grade based on standards in an equitable way. Inoue writes about a similar sense in his chapter, "How I Came to Labor-Based Grading Contracts." "I just figured," he writes, "that thoughtful, self-conscious, rhetorically-minded pedagogy could not be White supremacist, that if I made sure to treat everyone equally in my evaluations and grading, I wouldn't be racist. But I was wrong" (50). I certainly had the same estimation for a long time--I would just be conscious, I thought, of not grading in a racist way, and it wouldn't happen, as if, through sheer force of will, I could undo centuries of white supremacy in education. Then, like Inoue, I ran into the road blocks one would expect--how do I make writing about more than checking off boxes for my students? How do I make sure they aren't just looking at their grade, feeling satisfied or unsatisfied, and ignoring the feedback I painstakingly give them? How do I make assigning numbers to students' work feel like more than a cheap approximation of our hard work together? And, most importantly, how do I grade in a way that is not only 'not' racist, classist, etc., but, more importantly, *anti-racist*, *anti-classist*, dismantling and distributing power as a queered pedagogy demands?

Labor-based contract grading, in Inoue's model, answers all these questions, and more. Here, I'll go through how it's presented to my students in my syllabus, adding further citations

from Inoue's work and answering questions or addressing concerns on how it will function in my class. My syllabus, in the "Grades" section, introduces labor-based grading as follows:

You'll notice that the way our grades work in this class is a little different from classes you may have taken in the past, in that I'll be using labor-based grading to assess your work in this class. 'Labor-based' means precisely what it sounds like: I'll evaluate your work based on the labor you put into it, according to the table below. I do this for a few reasons: one, because grades, as we understand them--numbers that mean the value of a thing--have a way of flattening your work as writers, and making you look for two or three digits at the top of a page instead of feedback on your writing. Two, because grades, as you might have experienced them before, create a top-down, autocratic approach to running a class, which I don't want to perpetuate here. Three, because traditional grading makes students extrinsically motivated, whereas I'd like you all to be intrinsically motivated by a desire to do well in our class. And four, because, as we'll discuss over the course of our class, there are certain racist, classist, sexist ideas that holding up and idolizing a single, standard English reinforces, and I don't want to do that in our classroom. (5)

As elsewhere in my syllabus, and my course in general, one of my key goals here is to be transparent with my students. When they know why I'm making certain decisions in the classroom, they're better able to understand the pedagogy that helps me construct our class, and better able to meet my expectations. I also use transparency to help me teach queerly, in that it allows me to level, in all senses of the word, with my students, and destroy a boundary between the secret behind-the-scenes work of a teacher and the content of the class.

In the interest of transparency, I lay out the reasons I choose to use labor-based grading in my syllabus: encouraging students to think about their writing as an evolving, changing work not defined by a single grade, redistributing assessment as power, provoking intrinsic motivation over extrinsic, grade-based motivation, and valuing multiple Englishes and discourses. Inoue develops these ideas throughout *Labor-Based Grading Contracts*, writing in the coda, “Assessing English so that People Stop Killing Each Other,” “Ultimately, I promote (labor-based grading contracts) because they create sustainable and liveable conditions for locally diverse students and teachers to do antiracist, anti-White supremacist, and other social justice language work, conditions that are much harder to have when writing is graded on so-called quality or by some single standard, and when students’ labors are not fully recognized and valued” (306). Essentially, Inoue chooses labor-based grading contracts because they allow a capacity for what he calls “social justice language work,” work that decenters a single expectation for what effective writing looks like, and because they recognize the work put in by students, thereby encouraging and rewarding effort and process over or alongside result.

What, then, does labor-based grading look like? I describe it in my syllabus as follows, including the table below:

Here’s how (labor-based grading) works: for each grade, you’ll notice a series of conditions and expectations in the table below. If you want to receive an A at the end of our class, you’ll need to meet the expectations listed in that row; same for B, C, D, etc. The work you complete will also need to be done in the spirit it is assigned--that is, I expect your best effort to be put forward each time and according to the assignment’s prompt. Egregious failures to do so may require revisions, so please keep that in mind! Even though your writing won’t be given a

grade, you'll still get thorough feedback, and you have an opportunity to earn extra points as a result of exemplary work, as well--read on for more information on that. In the first week of our classes, you'll sign a contract with me electing to do the necessary work to earn the grade of your choosing. (We'll also hold conferences in the middle of the semester, in case you want to adjust your contract, or in case you're not holding up your end of the agreement). (5)

	<b>A (4.0)</b>	<b>B (3.1)</b>	<b>C (2.1)</b>	<b>D (1.1)</b>	<b>F (0.0)</b>
Non-Participating Days	3	3	4	4	5+
Late/Incomplete Work	3	3	4	5	5+
Missed Work	1	1	2	3	4+
Ignored Work	0	0	0	1	2+

Essentially, at the outset of the semester, students will choose the grade they'd like to receive in the course, and will sign a contract agreeing to do the necessary amount of work to earn that grade. This contract allows me to keep them accountable for their work, and lets me know what grade they're aiming to receive. In his "Appendix A" of *Labor-Based Grading Contracts*, Inoue lays out a version of a contract; I do the same in my course materials, to ensure that, under no uncertain terms, my students know exactly what they need to be doing to achieve the grade they desire. For the most part, this looks like meeting the expectations outlined above for each grade bracket, but, as you'll notice, the requirements for receiving an A and a B in the class are identical. This is because, like in Inoue's setup of the labor-based system, a B is my default

grade; students can only achieve an A by going above and beyond the call of duty, in ways I lay out in the respective grading contract and will expand on here.

One might ask why I don't use a C as my default grade, since it is, at least nominally, 'average.' My responses are as follows; one, as my students apply for college, I understand that a C will weigh more heavily on their transcripts (and, no doubt, on their minds) than a B will. Even though it is supposedly the 'average' grade, and the saying 'Cs get degrees' still echoes on college campuses the world over, a C may be seen by my students as only a hair above failure, whereas a B is a more respectable grade. Two, like Inoue explains, I set a B as my base grade "because I know that I tend to ask for a lot of labor of students, so getting an 'above average' grade seems appropriate to me if all the contract terms are met. The labor I'm asking of students is worth an above average grade in my opinion" (192). Of course, when B is the default, it becomes the average, but as I'm conscious of what my students' grades might look like to parents, future institutions, etc., I want them to reflect the amount of work they're doing in my class.

I go on, in my syllabus, to define my terms as listed in the grading table above. First: non-participating days. These, I write, are days on which students are absent, although extreme instances of presence in class without participation (habitual sleeping for the duration of class, for example) might count towards non-participating days. If a student has an extenuating circumstance, such as a family emergency, medical issue, or personal crisis, we can negotiate contract terms that will ensure their participation in class while being mindful of and compassionate to their needs as students. If the circumstance arises later on in the semester, we will be able to renegotiate the contract terms at midsemester conferences. Inoue uses the word "non-participating" because his institution won't allow him to deduct points from a grade based

on absences, and he still wants a metric by which to emphasize the importance of “bodily presence to learning” (134). Similarly, I include non-participating days in my contract to make sure to stress to my students that they cannot learn if they don’t participate in some form, and that they cannot participate if they aren’t in the room (physically, or, as has been tested in COVID-19 ‘Zoom University,’ virtually). I also use the language of non-participation over absence because though students may technically attend class, they may not always participate (although participation is not limited to the classic model of answering questions and talking in discussion) and the former language offers more space than the latter.

The second row on the chart, “Late/Incomplete Work,” simply refers to any work turned in within a 24-hour window after the due time, or work that does not meet the requirements of the assignment (more on this shortly). The syllabus specifies that “extensions, which will be granted in most cases provided you ask at least two weeks in advance, will move the due time accordingly,” and that “this policy, and all the other late work policies, apply to all assignments equally--a late Inkshedding will ‘weigh’ the same amount as a late paper” (6). I want to assess all late work equally because, regardless of the nature of the assignment, labor is labor, and late labor is late labor. I understand, of course, that sometimes, colloquially, life happens, and students turn things in late for one reason or another; hence the 3 permitted late assignments for A and B students, etc.. I also intentionally chose a 24-hour window because student writing will often be used in class, so it needs to be turned in, read by me, and turned back around to students by the next session of class. Since my class occurs every other day, a 24-hour window makes that possible; later than 24 hours means students won’t be able to use their writing in class, which makes things more difficult not only for them, or for me, but for their classmates, as they’ll be down one piece of writing to work with in the classroom.

Writing turned in over 24 hours late will be counted as “Missed Work,” per my syllabus, and is discouraged by the low maximum amount permitted for A, B, and C grades. Extensions work the same way here, so if a student anticipates, for one reason or another, needing more time to work on something, they’ll generally be granted it as long as they ask at least two weeks out. (Of course, in extraordinarily unforeseen circumstances, such as severe weather, family, medical, or personal emergencies, etc., extensions may be permitted after two weeks--with compassion, in most circumstances, as the order of the day, I offer that level of flexibility to my own judgement and to my students.)

Finally, “Ignored Work” is work I simply never receive. This is not allowed for obvious reasons--whereas a student may turn in work late because of circumstances out of their control, ignoring work is seen as a breach of the contract they create with me by their very presence in the classroom, that they want to learn and will at least make an effort to do the labor I ask. As Inoue writes, “the less one labors, the less one learns, and the less one learns, the less one is engaged and the lower one’s final course grade is” (159). Ignored work, then, is the paragon of a lack of labor; labor not merely delayed, but never done.

The obvious objection to labor-based contract grading is an understandable one, and one I had when I first learned about the system: ‘Well, what if students try to get away with lazy writing?’ My immediate response, as a convert to this system, is that students may do that anyway. There’s no reason to assume that students who would try their best and work their hardest in any standards-based class would, when entering a labor-based classroom, completely throw those ideals out the window. Labor-based grading also doesn’t mean we don’t talk about the quality of students’ writing; in fact, with the numbers and letters removed from the top of the page, the feedback in the margins--the thing that teaches students more than any one number--is

all the more important and visible. Inoue observes the same thing; “Grades say little about how or what learning actually took place around the making of the document,” he writes, “and only offer a hierarchical ranking of the student, which is deceptive, unfair most of the time, and harmful to the student—and it offers very little to the student in the way of feedback for improvement [...] So, grades hijack much of the purposes of any feedback that may be associated with it. This means they deny labor’s value to students and teacher” (148). Essentially, Inoue argues that grades intensify a transactional relationship between students and teachers--the student turns in work, the teacher reads it, grades it, and returns it. When discussing why traditional grading often sees feedback go unread and unused by students, Inoue’s answer is simple: “Their purpose is to get a grade, and you gave them that” (148). Their engagement with the writing ends when the grade is returned, because the grade is the point--under a labor-based model, the labor, not the grade, is the end goal of the work, since it is the labor, not the grade, that is the root of learning.

At the same time as I recognize the inherent racism and white supremacy in enforcing a single kind of English in my classroom, I also understand that it will take time for the rest of the world--including higher education and the corporate sector--to join me in seeing things that way. In light of that knowledge, and in the interest of equipping students for the future, I make sure my feedback notes where students diverge from ‘standard’ English. In doing this, I ensure that students are able to go into a future classroom, where white English is still prized as the only English, and meet the instructor’s demands, while knowing that their own Englishes are valuable and acknowledging the racism in the current English evaluation structure.

Labor-based grading also does not mean that you must accept work that will not help the student learn, or work that is incomplete; this is where the “Incomplete” part of “Late/Incomplete



Work” comes in. In my syllabus, based on Inoue’s writing, I use the phrase, “The work you complete will also need to be done in the spirit it is assigned;” Inoue uses the same phrase--”You agree to turn in properly and on time all work and assignments expected of you in the spirit they are assigned”--in his sample contract (134). This statement, along with the elaborations offered in the contracts, makes sure students know exactly what is expected of them (and don’t have any disillusionments about skimping on labor).

Inoue includes a helpful example of this concept in practice in addressing the question, “How Does A Teacher Determine When A Student Has Done Enough Labor To Get Credit For Any Given Labor/Assignment?” (200). He introduces an imaginary student, Liang, who doesn’t fully complete an assignment; the prompt is to, among other things, write a 150-word paragraph that discusses a component of an annotated reading, and while Liang does write and post exactly 150 words on time, he has not discussed the annotated reading. Thus, he has failed to complete the assignment because he has not done the required labor. “This labor is therefore incomplete,” Inoue says, “So I don’t count it, but I don’t ask him to do it again” (202). This incomplete work counts towards Liang’s total of late/incomplete assignments, allowing Inoue to reflect the undone labor in the gradebook, and, potentially, in the course grade for the student.

Inoue also describes an alternative situation; say Liang had written the paragraph, and met all the requirements, but in a shoddy, hasty, repetitive way. In that case, Inoue would not record anything in his gradebook, which he only does in cases of late, incomplete, missed, or ignored work, non-participation days, and exemplary work. He would, however, reach out to the student and ask him questions--”I would reply to him privately,” he writes, “and tell him what I’m confused about in his paragraph and labor, how I don’t think this kind of work will help him in meeting our goals. What happened? How are you finding the quote and how are you trying to

think about it?” and more (202). Finally, Inoue reminds readers of something that was difficult, but important and liberating, for me to digest in my teaching philosophy: “I leave Liang’s learning up to him, and so I must leave much of his labor to him” (202). The ultimate fact is that teachers cannot do our students’ learning or labor for them, and Inoue’s words here provide a helpful reminder that no grading schema, no matter how innovative, allows us to do so.

Inoue sums up the value of antiracist pedagogy as enacted by labor-based grading like in his coda, “Assessing English So That People Stop Killing Each Other.” When setting up his argument for the real violence inflicted by white supremacy in English, he asks, “Do standards in English writing classrooms kill people?” (306). The question seems hyperbolic, but as he continues, it becomes more real:

Maybe a better question is this: In a world of police brutality against Black and Brown people in the US, of border walls and regressive and harmful immigration policies, of increasing violence against Muslims, of women losing their rights to the control their own bodies, of overt White supremacy, of mass shootings in schools, of blatant refusals to be compassionate to the hundreds of thousands of refugees around the world, where do we really think this violence, discord, and killing starts? What is the nature of the ecologies in which some people find it necessary to oppress or kill others who are different from them, who think or speak or worship differently than them? All of these decisions are made by judging others by our own standards, and inevitably finding others wanting, deficient. (304)

As Inoue says, the root of the oppressions he names is a judgement made by the privileged against the marginalized. In the traditional classroom structure, the teacher is the one making the judgements; all other things being equal, they--we--are the privileged. The demand, then, is to

find a way that keeps us from replicating the kind of judgement that results in violence. By evaluating students based on labor, we are judging not their ability to replicate white English, but what they have learned, placing the focus on the kind of feedback that really teaches over a grade that flattens their labor as students, and ours as teachers.

### **Participation, Evaluation, and Engagement**

In their *Discussion as a Way of Teaching*, authors Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Preskill argue for a discussion-oriented pedagogical approach and tackle the complex and nebulous question of participation in the classroom. “Bland, generalized declarations that students will be graded in part on their ‘participation’,” they write, “ignores the subtleties and complications of race, gender, and personality and serves chiefly to induce panic and suspicion in anyone who feels less than comfortable in the culture of academe” (40). This comes as no surprise; what looks like participation for one student might seem completely foreign to another. Perhaps a student of color, aware of the white supremacist tendencies of the classroom, might feel afraid of being degraded or mocked because of the way they speak; women, queer students, students with disabilities, and other minoritized students might feel the same. It could also be that some students are naturally and inherently quieter than others, but are just as involved with the discussion as their more talkative peers. Still, we want to make sure all students are involved in the class, both for the purposes of evaluating their engagement with ideas and so we can ensure that, as teachers, we’re bringing everyone into the conversation effectively. The frustrating truth is that not only is there a single metric of participation that accurately reflects the engagement of all students--under a model of queer pedagogy, we are called on to assess what we mean and what we prioritize when we say ‘participation,’ in the first place.

Stacey Waite dives into this question in a subsection of *Teaching Queer* called “Queer Participation.” She writes about her suppositions about participation, suppositions that I shared at the beginning of my time as a teacher. “There were things I took for granted--” she writes, while discussing her experience with a student’s essay, “--that class participation means *talking* in class, that class participation is good, that the best students will participate in class, that the best model for teaching writing is a model in which students talk out loud to the group” (72). These understandings, which are so endemic to the education system that they feel present in every classroom and on every syllabus. “It’s a normative university value often posed as a problem for teachers to solve--often asking questions like, How can we get *participation* from students?” Waite writes (75). Waite’s understanding of the value and definition of participation is jarred when a student writes an essay critiquing what the student calls the “‘myth of extroversion’,” which sees silence in the classroom as an issue to be solved, not an unavoidable part of discussion, much less something to be welcomed.

Returning to the idea of failure as a key part of queer pedagogy, it makes sense to challenge the understanding of speech in a classroom as a key metric of learning. Waite’s student, the author of the essay, is a quiet one, but his essay is profoundly cogent and well-written--judging only on his volume of comments in the classroom, one could think he wasn’t engaging, but this essay proves otherwise. Similarly, I’ve had students who are virtually silent in the classroom produce the most phenomenal writing, calling into question my ideas about what a ‘lack’ of participation means for student engagement. At a conference with one such student in the spring of 2021, I mentioned how quiet she was in class; I told her that her writing was so strong, and that I’d like to hear her thoughts shared with her colleagues in the classroom. Her response, simple and straightforward, was that she answers the questions, or

responds to discussions, in her head, and then goes home and writes them into her reflections. I remember telling her that that was okay, and not to feel pressured to speak if she didn't want to, because I was at a loss for other words, and then thinking on the way home that that was just what those statements in syllabi about participation do; they pressure students to meet, as Brookfield and Preskill note, some often nebulous expectation of participation, when, evidenced by Waite's student and my own, the volume of classroom contributions means little when assessing student engagement.

What, then, makes a good classroom policy on participation? Should there be no policy at all? Should it be based on recollection and impression, or should we attempt to note down the frequency and quality of each students' comments in class (and, if so, what defines appropriate frequency or quality)? Brookfield and Preskill write that most ways of evaluating student participation are troublingly positivist; "First, an ideal type or exemplar of how an educational process should look is established...then, whether or not an activity is judged to be done well or poorly is determined by how closely it reproduces these exemplary characteristics. But discussion cannot be judged by how closely it approximates a decontextualized ideal" (227). That is, all discussions look different, because how any discussion looks is predicated almost fully on its makeup. (This is to say nothing of Inoue's concerns about a single evaluative model, which, when produced by any capital-P Pedagogy, always ends up being white supremacist, classist, and otherwise oppressive.)

Discussions are, in Brookfield and Preskill's words, "always contextual," which, they argue, means they can only truly be evaluated "from the inside" (277). They ultimately suggest that students evaluate their own participation in discussion, using a few models, including weekly discussion audits, which are analyzed and summarized at the end of the semester, and

using the fifteen “purposes for discussion” that the authors offer in Chapter Two to write weekly reflections about “the extent to which you think each of these purposes was accomplished,” including examples of the student’s own role in accomplishing those purposes (281). They also suggest the method I ultimately use in my course: a discussion log. In this method, the students respond to three questions to assess what they think they have learned. Brookfield and Preskill offer these questions:

1. What do you know as a result of participating in this discussion that you didn’t know last week?
2. What can you do as a result of participating in this discussion that you couldn’t do last week?
3. What could you teach someone to know or do as a result of participating in this discussion that you couldn’t teach them last week?

Inspired by this example, I wrote my own list of questions, which students in my course respond to at the end of every week as a brief reflection on their own participation. The questions are, from the “Discussion Reflection Assignment Sheet:”

- 1) How do you think you contributed to our classroom community this week?
- 2) What was an insight you shared with us, either in writing or in discussion, that you’re proud of?
- 3) What was an insight that was shared with you, either in writing or discussion, that you think the sharer should be proud of?
- 4) What are your goals for contributions for next week? Is there anything you’d like to do differently? More? Less?

I make a few interventions on the original questions here: first, rather than referring to one discussion, I broaden my questions to encompass a whole week's worth. I want to expand my students' opportunity to share their experiences from my class, especially when not every day will be a discussion-centered day; some will be focused on peer review or in-class writing, and while my students are welcome to respond in terms of those days, they also have a more easily quantifiable learning product in the form of writing or comments on a classmate's work. I also reorient the questions to look at my students' present and future learning, as opposed to dwelling in the past, to keep students from fixating on the ways in which their classmates might have had more or less academic experience or knowledge before starting our class. The first question reflects a focus on the classroom community as a whole, while the second and fourth turn inward, asking the student to acknowledge their own positive work or to challenge themselves to set goals. Finally, the third question encourages students to praise one another for their classroom contributions; if I see many students mentioning a particular student's work, I may also acknowledge that student at the beginning of the next session of class, either publicly or privately. Much like Inoue's encouragement that students be trusted to judge their own labor, this model of participation self-assessment offers a decentering of the teacher as evaluator and instead allows for a discussion of what participation looks like, what it means, and how it might manifest for different students.

### **Miscellany: Classroom Charters and Revision**

Though the predominant pieces that make up my syllabus--readings, grading, and participation/discussion--have been covered here already, there are some miscellaneous pieces that are too crucial to leave as mere annotations on the syllabus itself, but not complex enough to warrant whole sections on each. My use of classroom charters as a means of decentering my

power, and my focus on revision and process as part of both labor-based grading and queer pedagogy, are two such pieces that I give their due development here.

I begin with classroom charter, also called “classroom community charters” in my syllabus. This is a document we--my students and I--assemble at the beginning of the semester, usually on the second day of class. The process begins with a discussion, first as individual breakout groups and then as a whole class, of what behaviors we think are conducive to a classroom environment that encourages learning for all students, and what behaviors we think detract from that purpose. During each discussion, we take notes, either on paper in our small groups or on the board in our full group, or in a shared Google doc if virtual. We then synthesize these notes into a classroom community charter, on which we base our behavior on for the rest of the semester. This list may include components like “Give everyone a chance to speak,” “Don’t be afraid to ask for help,” or “Actively listen,” all of which have turned up on classroom charters of mine before.

As the teacher, I guide these discussions, but the onus for creating the list falls primarily on the students--I only step in if I feel an important piece is missing, or to help synthesize similar ideas into one single point. When I’ve generated classroom community standards with the students, they come up with almost every element that needs to be included on their own--I rarely need to step in to make additions, and if I do, it’s only to push their thoughts a little further (for example, I’ve often asked, “So, when we say ‘Be respectful,’ what does that look like? How would that look during a disagreement or a tense conversation?”). Past lists, both of which were generated for online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic, have featured inclusivity and respect for fellow students, preparedness for class, and engagement in discussion as strong, recurring themes. This process not only gives me a sense for my students’ priorities; it also gives



them the chance to be a part of our classroom community and to be intentional in its creation. This notion of community, and of decentering my authority as a teacher, is one taken up by ideas of queer pedagogy. In *Teaching Queer*, Waite writes, “I subscribe neither to a critical pedagogy model (in which I am the guide who leads my students into the light) nor a model whereby I pretend I have no authority--or pretend that my students and I are ‘equals.’ Institutionally and, quite honestly, socially, that is not possible” (97). To suggest that student and teacher can have a peer-to-peer relationship is a diminishment of the structural and institutional elements and inequities that are at play in education; as Waite goes on to discuss, it can also be instructive to have a teacher’s voice come in and offer “a kind of certainty about what is valued” (97). The creation of the classroom charter with my students allows for that tension Waite describes--not exercising unilateral, capital-P Pedagogical authority as the teacher, while also stepping in with that “certainty” that our position offers to affirm what we value in our classroom.

I’ve also opted to, rather than asking my students to write multiple different papers throughout the course, spend our whole semester fine-tuning a single paper. This allows me to break the work up into steps, each of which becomes an assignment, and each of which is assisted by our classroom community, instead of allowing the processes of writing to remain private or unsupported. First, students write proposals, relatively early in the semester, so we can be sure that we’re working towards something that is conducive to course goals, not too broad or narrow in scope, etc. (For more on what these look like, see “Proposals 1 and 2” in “Course Materials: Assignment Sheets.”) Then, their first papers are turned in at around midterm, with the conscious understanding on all our parts that this is a draft, a work in progress. I give feedback on the papers, including line edits and a brief note at the end that summarizes strengths and improvement areas, and then meet with the student to go over the draft in a conference. At

the end of that week, a second round of proposals are due, in which students address what they did well in their first paper, what they could do better, and how they aim to revise their papers. This is also an opportunity for them to, if they'd like, change their topics, perhaps to analyze a more recent reading they only encountered after writing their first proposal. The rest of the semester will largely be devoted to writing, focusing on areas with which the students struggled in their first drafts. Finally, at the end of the semester, the revision will be turned in as the final paper, an indication of not only the content the student learned, but also the writing skills they gained.

My approach to writing here is meant to highlight the process of writing, rather than the product--to make visible the work of writing, from generation of ideas to revision. This process-focused approach supports, and is supported by, labor-based contract grading, both of which further queer pedagogy in its decentering of a correct product of learning. The very nature of the labor-based grading contract places the focus on the labor of writing rather than the product; the most important thing is that students put in the work, which allows them to do the learning. Inoue, in his *Labor-Based Grading Contracts*, writes, "we want students to strive for better and deeper learning, to take risks in their writing, and to focus on (be conscious of) their writing processes and the ways their audiences react to decisions they've made in texts. We do not want them focused on the grades assigned to the products they turn in, yet many of us give those grades when we do not have to" (156). Essentially, labor-based grading forces students to turn their attention to that writing process, a process which is made all the more visible by the structure of my course's assignments and their focus on revision and growth.

The focus on process here also comes as a fruit of queer pedagogy. In *Teaching Queer*, Waite writes about revision as part of "becoming;" "I want to ask students to see revision not

only as a process of looking back at their own writing but also as a process of looking back at themselves in order to make self-reflexive moves explicitly *about* their own becoming--becoming a gender, becoming a reader, becoming a writer” (114). In my second ENWR class, where I tested out the slate of major assignments that I use in my syllabus here, I emphasized to students the importance of looking back on their writing as a vestige of the person they were when it was written, and as a part of their road to becoming the person they are now and will be when they turn in their revision at the semester’s end. Revising as becoming is paralleled in writing, where it becomes process as product--where, in Inoue’s model, the work you do is where the learning is done, and the learning is the goal. Writing and reading are the locations of the learning, the growth, the becoming, the desired products of the course; the papers and reflections students that result from that work, are decentered, by-product. Queer pedagogy also eschews the idea of correctness or rightness--returning to Rhodes’ video essay, “The Failure of Queer Pedagogy,” “The queer challenges such disciplining, such assimilation, and resists the demarkation of acceptable and unacceptable, appropriate and inappropriate.” Placing the focus on the process makes that challenge manifest, letting my students and I dwell in the space of possibility, which is, as Judith Butler writes in *Undoing Gender*, “as crucial as bread,” rather than the finite space, where writing is judged as a correct or incorrect product of learning (29).

### **Conclusion: Queerness and Capital-P Pedagogy**

I am keenly aware that the interventions I suggest here, and the kind of pedagogy I practice, are not going to be welcomed at every school. I know some administrators and schoolboards would be appalled at the idea of an openly queer person teaching anything in their classrooms, much less one teaching queer content in a queer way. As a student, I saw that disdain for queerness on the faces of teachers, administrators, schoolboard members; I continue to see it

as states debate whether or not trans women and girls should be allowed to play on women's sports teams, or whether or not trans children should be allowed to use the bathrooms of their gender. As Inoue, Waite, Rhodes, and others have acknowledged, the Pedagogical world is hostile to anything that threatens it--it does its best to quash anything that does not conform to its heterosexed, white, patriarchal, cisgendered, capitalist aims. Waite writes, "Even when I imagine the most radical places I can bring to mind, not one of them is innocent of the charge of 'disciplining the subject.' There is, in the end, no outside of institutional constraints even if and when one imagines oneself as outside an actual institution" (7). Why, then, create a course like this one, which aims to imbue radical queerness into its every decision, from grading to assignment selections to readings, when the current conditions of the educational system are so likely to constrain it? Why labor against Pedagogy when, according to Waite, it can never really be escaped?

Though Waite acknowledges the endlessness of the web of Pedagogy, she also sees some value in working against it; otherwise, why would she write *Teaching Queer*, the very project of which is to push against and destabilize Pedagogical norms? Ultimately, to suggest that, since Pedagogy is inescapable, resistance is pointless, ignores and abandons those currently being disciplined by it, and tacitly agrees with its aims. The notion that one might as well cave to white supremacist, patriarchal, anti-queer standards, since they are everywhere, leaves for dead--perhaps literally--students of color, queer students, and other marginalized and minoritized students currently moving through our school systems. The evils and ills of the system of education are not ignored by scholars like Waite and Inoue, whose work is in the business of combating them. Like me, they are aware of the long odds of making structural, large-scale changes because of the actions of one teacher (even one with a large platform, and many

publications to their name). Still, they construct antiracist grading schemas, or dedicate whole books and careers to “teaching queer,” out of a desire to change and better education for a few students at a time.

I believe it can also be instructive to take this change towards queer pedagogy as incremental. During a conversation with Waite, she discussed how to teach queerly under current Pedagogical systems. In any space, as the project of queer theory itself encourages, she suggested that one look at the norms, ask if they are harming anyone, and consider how they should or can be subverted or resisted, constructing your course from that position. Perhaps, for example, I cannot officially institute labor-based grading--can I remove grammar from my grading process, to take one step away from white supremacist evaluative formations, grade based on contracts with my students, or even informally grade based on labor? Perhaps I cannot assign openly queer texts--can I encourage the reading of the canon through a queer lens, or ask students discussion questions that draw their eye to normative structures at work in any piece of writing? I've constructed this course as if my administration's goals are exactly and vocally aligned with mine, but I realize, in the real world, that, as Waite says, I cannot avoid the Pedagogical system more than anyone else--in that case, in the queer practice of this work, I will do what queer methodologies and queer people have always done, and scavenge, per Halberstam in *Female Masculinity*, the pedagogical space for what will support my students' learning and my aims of working against normativity, for a world of queerer writers, queerer readers, and queerer thinking.

## Works Cited

- Brookfield, Stephen, and Stephen Preskill. *Discussion As a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*. 2nd ed. Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519–531. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/3207893](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893). Accessed 24 Apr. 2021.
- Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*. Routledge, 2004.
- Carson, Anne. *Autobiography of Red: A Novel In Verse*. Vintage Books of Random House, 1999.
- Cavalcante, Andre. *Struggling for Ordinary: Media and Transgender Belonging In Everyday Life*. New York University Press, 2018.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." *Feminist Legal Theory: Readings in Law and Gender*, edited by Katharine T. Bartlett, Rosanne Kennedy, Westview Press, 1991, 57-80.
- Enow, Linda, and Andrew Goodwyn. "The Invisible Plan: How English Teachers Develop Their Expertise and the Special Place of Adapting the Skills of Lesson Planning." *English In Education*, vol. 52, no. 2, 1 Jan. 2018, pp. 120 - 134.
- "Font Face." *Accessibility: Accessibility and Usability at Penn State*, Penn State. <https://accessibility.psu.edu/legibility/fontface/>. Accessed April 25, 2021.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. Vintage Books of Random House, 1990.
- Halberstam, Jack. *Female Masculinity*. Duke University Press, 1998.
- Halberstam, Jack. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Duke University Press, 2011.

- Halperin, David M. *How to Be Gay*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012.
- hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.
- Inoue, Asao B. *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado, 2019.
- Johnson, E. Patrick. "'Quare' Studies, Or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned From My Grandmother." *Text & Performance Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1 Jan. 2001, pp. 1-25.
- Lorde, Audre. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Crossing Press, 1982.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York University Press, 2009.
- Nemi Neto, João. "Queer Pedagogy: Approaches to Inclusive Teaching." *Policy Futures in Education*, vol. 16, no. 5, June 2018, pp. 589–604, doi:10.1177/1478210317751273.
- Pritchard, Eric Darnell. *Fashioning Lives: Black Queers and the Politics of Literacy*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2016.
- Rhodes. Jaqueline. "The Failure of Queer Pedagogy." *Vimeo*, uploaded by David Blakesley, April 18 2015, <https://vimeo.com/125334064>. Accessed April 17 2021.
- Shakespeare, William. *Twelfth Night* from The Folger Shakespeare. Ed. Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger Shakespeare Library, April 24, 2021. <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/twelfth-night>
- "Twelfth Night." *Folgerpedia*, The Folger Shakespeare Library. [https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Twelfth\\_Night](https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Twelfth_Night). Accessed April 29, 2021.
- Waite, Stacey. *Teaching Queer*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017.

Wilde, Oscar, edited by Nicholas Frankel. *The Uncensored Picture of Dorian Gray*. Belknap  
Press of Harvard University Press, 2011.