

Transformative Texts FYE

As the first general education course most of our students will encounter at OU, we want the transformative text seminar course to be exciting, interesting, engrossing, and fun for our students to take and for us to teach. This first-year course aims to give students the experience of deep reading. We want to invite them to see how sustained reading, and the discussion of it, can be profoundly joyful, and can aid in creating and understanding community.

Our transformative text model FYE achieves this by having students read and discuss works that they will enjoy reading in a community, and that are indeed pleasurable to read and discuss alongside others. Transformative texts, which are generally well-known works of literature, philosophy, history, and social thought, are conceptually, stylistically, and rhetorically rich, inviting reflection not just on what is said, but on how it is said. Often, these works prompt a range of creative and critical responses. And, perhaps most importantly, they raise big and pressing questions about the world and how we might live in it: What is a good life? How do we change the world? Where does inequality come from? What can laughter and tears accomplish? What is justice? What is the relation between bodies, feelings, and ideas? How do we deem something beautiful? Who decides what's a fact? What is education supposed to do?

Transformative texts can include a diversity of writing, such as Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Sappho's *Poems* (c. 630 BC), Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1596), Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* (1859), Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), James' *The Black Jacobins* (1938), Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), and Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* (2015). These are just a few examples, but like other universities who have adopted this type of FYE, faculty will work to compile a list of 100 to 200 common readings that each of us can then choose from as we develop our transformative texts syllabi. (Consider, for example, the [listing](#) for Purdue's award-winning [Cornerstone program](#).)

We believe this FYE model is responsive to the generous feedback you've offered our committee about the need to prepare our students to be more engaged and practiced readers, writers, and critical/creative thinkers. The readings and discussions will provide a concrete occasion for our students to reflect on and refine their skills, from active reading and effective writing to in-class note-taking and time management. This approach to FYE will challenge our students to read significant, difficult texts and grapple with the important questions those texts raise. But the difficulty is the point. When students discover the fun of absorbing stories, rich language, and complex ideas, they develop curiosity, resilience, and perseverance. Students will work through these texts and topics in small discussion-based classes, fostering a greater sense of community and developing the dispositions that fill follow them through their time here. Topics for these text-centered FYEs will be current and relevant to student and faculty lives, preparing students for engaged citizenship, affording their success on-campus, and bringing into focus the value of higher education and their agency in pursuing it. And since this course will be taught by faculty from many fields, we expect that each section will feature a discipline-specific learning goal and course texts, providing first-year students with a sense of how knowledge is created, valued, and used in different departments.

To give a concrete sense of what our transformative texts first-year experience seminar might look like, we've created several sample syllabi ideas. These syllabi, we hope, show how faculty from every unit on campus might craft a transformative texts FYE that serves our students and that is rewarding to teach.