

Ethnic Studies Syllabus

2026/2027

Teacher: Tommy J. Coleman

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Room 27

Course Overview

Students in this course will read and analyze a broad range of nonfiction and fiction selections written primarily by authors of color, deepening their awareness of how language works in effectively communicating ideas. The course provides an introduction to informational and literary genres and lays a foundation of critical reading and analytical

writing skills in preparation for honors-level work in the sophomore year leading to Advanced Placement and/or International Baccalaureate courses. Through texts that range from essays, speeches, articles, historical documents, novels, plays, poetry and short stories, students will analyze the use of elements of literature and nonfiction using the SAUSD Ethnic Studies Five Guiding Pillars for interdisciplinary learning. As they develop their writing skills and respond to claims, students will learn to formulate arguments and use textual evidence to support their position. To improve their listening, speaking, and civic engagement skills students will engage with a variety of media types.

Students will build their writing and speaking skills in journal responses, discussions, frequent free response exercises, and essays or presentations.

Additionally, this course aims to educate students to be politically, socially, and economically conscious about their personal connections to local and global histories.

By studying the histories of race, indigeneity, ancestry, national origin, diaspora, racism, hegemony, ethnicity, and culture, students will develop respect and empathy for individuals, groups of people locally, nationally, and globally.

By participating in a student/community-centered Project Based Learning Assignment or Youth Participatory Research Project, students will build self-awareness, solidarity, self-determination and foster active consciousness, social engagement and agency.

The

project along with a comprehensive written exam will allow students to demonstrate higher order thinking skills, problem solving, critical thinking, and investigation and inquiry techniques.

Course Policies

Incomplete/ Missing Work Policy: Students are expected to turn in all work on the assigned due date. Work not turned in on the day it is due will be marked as a missing assignment in Schoology until it is submitted.

Absences/Make-up: If a student is absent, it is their responsibility to find out what they missed and need to complete assignments upon returning to school. If a student is absent for an extended period of time, they will be given a limited time to complete all missing work.

Extra Help and Communication with the Teacher: Students can ask questions during class, write a note or an email, or come after school. Please be sure to get extra help if you need it. My email address is toclem3@lausd.net

Grading Scale	Weighted Scale
100-90% =A	Classwork 15%
89-80% =B	Homework 10%
79-70% =C	Participation 15%
69-60% =D	Quiz 25%
59-0% =Fail	Test 35%

Unit 1: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in America

The first unit provides an introduction to the key terms of race, ethnicity, racism, hegemony, master-narrative, oppression, assimilation, acculturation, nativism, discrimination, and intersectionality. With a focus on national origin, students find ways

to recognize what ethnic studies is and its role in current events. Through different

readings and sources, students will be asked to discuss and respond to the following

questions:

- What is identity?"
- What is the difference between race, ethnicity, national origin?
- What are the origins of race, racism and white supremacy in the United States?

- How has race been socially constructed?
- What are the origins of “blood-quantum” being a measure for “race”?
- What does it mean to be “colorblind”?
- What does it mean to be American?
- What does oppression mean and how is it carried out?
- What is prejudice, stereotype, and discrimination?
- How do stereotypes affect our own identities and why do they negate us of our individuality?
- How can stereotypes affect our thinking of different social groups?
- How do media stereotypes of different social groups lead to the scapegoating and discrimination of marginalized communities in the United States?
- How does social media impact how a person identifies themselves?
- How do we define ourselves?

Core Assignments

1. During the unit students will engage in a lesson that discusses the traditional literary canon and the history of neglected literature written by Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) authors in the United States. The objective of the lesson will be for students to survey, research, discuss and critique the fact that books written by people of color in the United States are not typically assigned as mandatory readings in the public school systems. Through structured academic discussion (socratic seminar, philosophical chairs, etc.) students will discuss facts and identify potential harms that occur when there is misrepresentation or lack of representation of texts written by BIPOC in assigned texts.
2. At the end of the unit, using information from group discussions, research and readings, students will write: a personal narrative, video, storyboard, or timeline. Students will reflect on their national origins, family ethnic roots, as well as past experiences with discrimination, privilege and disadvantage.
3. Students will be provided with a choice to complete one of the following creative projects for the novel in this unit: (a) Create a comic or graphic novel of at least ten panels that retells a pivotal scene in *Damselfly* (b) Re-create one of Anne Marie’s pieces of art including a few paragraphs explaining the significance of the artwork as it relates to her character’s experiences. (c) Create a newscast report for

Damselfly based on one’s interpretation of the novel’s plot and conflict among the characters.

Unit 2: African American Literature

In the second unit, students will explore the experience of African Americans through literature both historically and in terms of contemporary issues. Through different readings and sources, students will be asked to discuss and respond to the following questions:

- What role does African American literature play in the identity-development of the United States?

- How has African American literature reflected the struggles that African-American communities have experienced by region?
- How has society defined beauty, truth, and goodness?
- How has the development of images, often stereotypes, reduced or magnified an individual, particularly Black identity?
- What role does self-determination play in the trajectory of the African American Community?
- What role does self-determination play in the trajectory of African American art, literature and aesthetics?
- What is internalized oppression and internalized racism? How may changing the beauty standards to embrace “dark” and “black” as beautiful be a way to resist the common standards of beauty?

Core Assignments

1. In the beginning of the unit, students will create a group oral presentation using google-slides, prezi, a video, or poster on one of the following topics: the role of African-American Literature, the role of African-American youth in the Civil Rights movement; the Black Lives Matter Movement, or internalized racism & oppression in regards to skin color and standard of beauty as perceived by the media. The purpose of the presentation will be for students to research and inform each other on various introductory topics that segway to reading the core text for the unit.

2. Students will develop a processed formal writing assignment (essay) by comparing and contrasting the themes in *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin* by Kirsten Childs to another short fiction piece written by a person of color about standards of beauty. In preparation for the essay, students will analyze each piece deeply, using the three levels of reading approach, in which they first find meaning directly in the text (reading on the line); then they analyze what they read by interpreting, classifying, comparing, contrasting, and finding patterns in the texts (reading between the lines).

Finally, students move beyond the text to connect to an Ethnic Studies framework/analysis (reading beyond the lines)

Unit 3: Chicano/a and Latinx Literature

In the third unit students will inquire about histories, current narratives, and topics

relating to Chicano/a and Latinx communities throughout the United States. By reading and analyzing primary nonfiction and fiction texts written by Chicano/a and

Latinx authors, as well as a variety of supplementary texts, students will be asked to

discuss and respond to the following questions:

- What is the historical context of Chicano/a and Latinx literature?
- How did the various ethnic and language identities within this community

develop?

- Who are some major authors during the period of major literary art production in the Chicano/a and Latinx community?
- How do various Chicano/a and Latinx authors write on the topic of identity in their work?
- What are some contemporary issues affecting the Chicano/a and Latinx communities?
- What are various themes in contemporary Chicano/a and Latinx literature?
- How does the media portray the issue of immigration and crime?

Guiding questions for *The Distance Between Us* by Reyna Grande may include:

- What are the characteristics of a memoir? How are the characteristics of a memoir developed by the author?
- How does economic-poverty affect Reyna's family in the beginning of the novel?
- How are the children in the story affected by their parents' migration to the U.S.?
- How does the author's use of figurative language impact the reader's understanding of the setting, plot and characters throughout the novel?
- What are some metaphorical symbols that are significant to understanding how Reyna feels as a child in Mexico, and in her journey to the U.S.? (i.e. the trains that pass through Iguala and the train station in Iguala, her grandmother's house, new clothes, the U.S./ Mexico border, her parent's picture frame, the helicopter, etc.)
- How does the author use these symbols to make connections between complex ideas presented in the memoir?
- How does immigration status, language, and belonging to multiple nationalities impact Reyna's identity development in the second half of the novel?
- What is the role that education plays in Reyna's self-empowerment and journey to independence?

Core Assignments:

At the end of the unit, students will choose one of the following:

A. Write an argumentative/expository essay on the following prompt:

"Read 2-3 articles that discuss how the U.S. media portrays immigration.

Take a stance on whether you believe the mainstream media correctly portrays the issue of immigration and crime. Use evidence from the non-fiction articles as well as details from the plot and characters in "The Distance Between Us," by Reyna Grande to support your stance.

B. Create a newscast, or newspaper article about a social issue currently affecting the Chicano/a or Latinx community and share it with the journalism

or Student-Media group as a submission for publication and/or broadcasting.

C. Youth Project Action Research, Issues to Action projects or Project Based Learning Lessons - Students will choose an issue that affects them the most or that they are most passionate about. They will do in-depth research and analysis as well as develop a process for improvement. One day a week will be dedicated to working on this community engagement project.

Unit 4: Asian American Literature

In this unit, students will study and explore the experience of Asian Americans both

historically and in terms of contemporary issues. Students will explore statistics and the

diverse ethnic groups living in the United States within the Asian-American minority and

read texts from various Asian American authors. Through different readings and sources,

students will be asked to discuss and respond to the following questions:

- What is the history of the term, “model minority”? What political purposes did it have in its formation?
 - What does the term “monolithic ethnic minority” mean? How does lumping all Asian groups under the category “Asian American” affect the specific ethnic groups within the Asian American community such as the Pacific Islanders and Southeast Asian communities?
 - How does the Asian-Diaspora present itself in Asian-American Literature?
 - Why is it important to understand the role of the U.S. in the War in Vietnam in order to understand the Southeast Asian refugee experience?
 - What role did Asian Americans play in the growth and development of our community? Focus on the development of Little Saigon in Orange County.
 - What opportunities do students have to enact positive change for Asian Americans, especially with the rise of Anti-Asian Violence across the U.S.?
- (Discuss the hurtful stereotypes that have lead to scapegoating Asian Americans which has caused violence and displacement in the past)

Unit 5: Indigenous/Native American Literature

In this unit, students will study the experience of Indigenous/Native American People both

historically and in terms of contemporary issues by reading and interpreting informational

and literary texts. Through different readings and sources, students will be asked to

discuss and respond to the following questions:

- Who are the First Nation Peoples of Orange County? What do recorded historical narratives by Acjachemen tribal leaders and elders tell us about their tribe's identity and culture? What do the narratives tell us about Orange County that we did not know before? How can we incorporate this knowledge into our class?
- How has Western colonization affected First Nation peoples?
- What role has cultural and language assimilation played in the experience of First Nations peoples?
- What role has the removal of ancestral-land, ancestral-knowledge, and ancestral traditions played in the experience of First Nations people as told by Native American authors?
- What do textual accounts written by Native American authors say about the effects of boarding schools, and/or Western education on First Nations people?
- What are common themes in Indigenous Native American literature?
- Who were the Navajo Codetalkers during WWII? What role did they have in the war? How did their special role impact their life once they returned home after the war? (WWII focus due to Core Novel)
- What challenges continue to face First Nations?
- What opportunities do students have to enact positive change for First Nations?

Core Assignments

1. Using research-based methods students will collaborate in groups to create and present a powerpoint presentation after accessing primary texts to report on any of the following time-periods/topics: Native American History of the Southwest: Colonization, Removal and Relocation, Laguna Pueblo History & Culture, Acjachemen History, The Navajo Code-Talkers of WWII, etc.
2. Students will write a processed Expository Essay or Literary Response Essay, with the opportunity to develop multi-drafts, and self-reflect using writing workshops or writing circles.

Prompts may include:

- (Literary Analysis) How do Tayo's Laguna-Pueblo stories and language help the reader understand Tayo's illness?
- What are recurring symbols that are fundamental to understanding the structure of the novel? What do those symbols signify (ie. four cardinal directions, colors, natural elements, spiritual deities, etc.)?

- (Ethnic Studies Analysis) As readers, what are the limitations of reading this novel through a Western perspective of time? What are the limitations of labeling Tayo's illness as "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?" What are the limitations of labeling Tayo's dreams and visions if we label them the way Western literature labels such

stories: folk, myth, or magic-realism?

3. Continue working on YPAR, Action Civics or Project Based Learning project.

Unit 6: Gender Identity and LGBTQ Community

The sixth unit examines power through different genders and the discrimination of the

LGBTQ community. Through different readings and sources, students will be asked to

discuss and respond to the following questions:

- What is gender? What is the difference between biological gender and chosen gender identity?
- How are the definitions of gender culturally or socially constructed?
- What is the definition of gender fluidity?
- How has women's inequality been enforced throughout U.S. history?
- How does liberation and justice for women of color look like in the U.S.?
- How does heterosexism discriminate against the LGBTQ community and how have people organized for the representation LGBTQ rights?
- What is patriarchy, sexism, and homophobia?
- How does patriarchy affect the lives of women?
- How does patriarchy and homophobia affect the lives of LGBTQ BIPOC?
- How does patriarchy affect the lives of men?

Core Assignments

1. Students will write a short informational paper that reflects on key issues faced by LGBTQ famous people in history that have challenged sexism and/or heterosexism.

2. Students will develop a poster that promotes acceptance and respect for the LGBTQ community and create an awareness campaign in their campus by placing the posters around the school. The class can create a written message and have peers announce it in the morning announcements to help spread awareness about the purpose of the poster campaign.

3. Students will practice letter formatting and formal writing by writing a letter to Yolanda or Mari in the point of view of the other character. If students write from the point of view of Yolanda, they will write a letter for Mari. Vice versa, if students write a letter from the Point-of-view of Mari, they will write a letter for Yolanda. Students will need to consider the point-of-view of the character they are writing on behalf of and they will express their thoughts about a particular time in the story (at the end of the story or years later.)

4. Continue working on YPAR, Action Civics or Project Based Learning project.

