

Evan Corson

Portfolio

Professor Curtis-Cummins,

Entering this class at the start of this semester I really had no idea what this class was going to be like from the atmosphere to the type of writing we would be doing. Today as I am looking back at the class, I appreciate the activities we did to better my writing and literary analysis.

The first essay we were assigned after reading *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* was my favorite essay to write by far. The reason I liked this essay more than any other essay we did was because of how much I liked the book. I am not a big reader, but after reading the first section of this book I was hooked, I didn't really even find this essay very challenging because I was eager to write about my perspective of the use of cultural references in the book.

Unlike my essay about Oscar Wao, I found Essay #4 very difficult. When it came to comparing the stories we read and finding a common theme between them, I struggled a bit. I think I had a harder time with this essay because the stories we read were harder to analyze. Also, when I first started the prompt I realized I had analyzed the prompt wrong and had to redo most of it.

Looking back on the revision process we had in this class, I realize it was very helpful.

Whenever I would go into the writing center and show my teacher the feedback you gave she would say she feels bad because she doesn't give that much feedback to her students. When I would start revising my essays and look at the revisions you gave to us, I understood all of the comments that you left and was able to fix them and make my essays much better. A lot of the changes I made had to do with narrowing my topic and thesis to match with the other

paragraphs. One example of a revision you suggested was on my essay 2 about Tupac and his poem "Life Through My Eyez", you suggested that I connect it with Gugelberg's idea of the canon. I took note of that and added, 'This connects with what Gugelberger says about having to learn from the Third World writer how to consider what is really going on in the world and why it has been going on'.

As I write my last concluding paragraph for anything in Literary Engagements, I would like to thank you for teacher a great class that I feel did grow my knowledge of writing and being able to analyze tougher writing. I appreciate the way you ran the class, it wasn't you standing up there and lecturing the whole time, but rather you involved us and had us carry the conversation of what we are learning (as much as possible). This I feel helped me with the essays because I expressed my ideas and was able to see other points of view before we even got writing the essay. I thank you for this experience and hope you have a great summer!

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Lit Engagements

Essay #1

The Not so Brief and Not so Wondrous Reign of Trujillo

The Brief Wondrous life of Oscar Wao takes place in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic in the era of Trujillo's reign. Trujillo became president of the Dominican Republic in 1930. He was in office officially until 1938 then again in 1942-1952, but continued to rule by force for ten more years until he was finally assassinated. The author, Junot Diaz, was born in the Dominican Republic and in the preface talks about the stories he's told about Trujillo and his reign and the "fuku" he left on the people. From a young age Diaz was fascinated with comic books and all aspects of them, especially the villain, which is how Trujillo is portrayed from the stories in Diaz's book. Throughout the book Diaz plays with the reoccurring cultural references that include comic books and other pop culture literature to easier connect your understanding to trujillo and his reign.

During Trujillo's reign he was thought of as a scary figure, a villain by the people living in Santo Domingo at the time. To show this, Diaz compares Trujillo to Darkseid, a fictional supervillain appearing in American comic books published by DC Comics, as the ruler of the planet Apokolips, Darkseid's ultimate goal is to conquer the universe and eliminate all free will (dictatorship?). Diaz made the connection by saying "he was our Sauron, our Arawn, our Darkseid, our Once and Future dictator, a personaje so outlandish, so perverse, so dreadful, that not even a sci-fi writer could have made his ass up"(142). Diaz was right to compare the two villains because of their glaring similarities, to compare, Darkseid is one of the most powerful beings in the DC Universe and Trujillo is similarly seen as the most powerful being of the Dominican Republic. Another similarity between the two villains is the want to eliminate free

will. Trujillo is a dictator, meaning he is the sole person who governs the country, which eliminates people's free will. One example of this is when Trujillo demanded that Abelard's beautiful daughter be brought to the party for him to have his way with her. When Abelard did not follow Trujillo's instructions he was sentenced to 18 years in jail.

Diaz uses cultural references throughout the book when describing Trujillo and his regime. At the start of the section titled "Santo Domingo Confidential" the Trujillato is compared to an episode of the Twilight Zone. Diaz states "In some ways living in Santo Domingo during the trujillato was a lot like being in that famous Twilight Zone episode that Oscar loved so much, the one where the monstrous white kid with the godlike powers rules over a town that is completely isolated from the rest of the world, a town called Peaksville"(224). The metaphor Diaz uses is clear : like the people of Peaksville, Dominicans lived in fear of the regime. Diaz also used vocabulary like "monstrous" and "godlike" to describe Trujillo, a reflection of the way his people viewed him.

Diaz also uses comic book references and comic book vocabulary in important epigraphs throughout the book to help explain Trujillo's "godlikeness". Before the start of section II, in an epigraph Diaz writes "Men are not indispensable. But Trujillo is irreplaceable. For Trujillo is not a man. He is... a cosmic force.... Those who try to compare him to ordinary contemporaries are mistaken. He belongs to...the category of those born to a special destiny.—La Nación"(204). By the end of the novel, Trujillo becomes a presence of evil. He's more than a political dictator, he's an evil spirit that hovers over everyone that lived in Santo Domingo, casting a long evil shadow (or fuku) over their lives. There is a similar theme of Trujillo also seen as more than a human being throughout the book, he is almost perceived as being supernatural. Earlier in the book Trujillo was compared to the "monstrous white kid with the godlike powers" in an episode of the twilight zone, and then in an epigraph Diaz quotes a

newspaper at the time saying that Trujillo is “irreplaceable” and “Trujillo is not a man. He is a cosmic force”. This i feel, is a theme that walks hand and hand with the reason Diaz uses as many comic book cultural references as he does. Comic books are the only thing that talks about supernatural powers and godlike beings.

Trujillo is meant to be perceived as the villain because he was one. The cultural references that Diaz uses to describe and develop Trujillos character prove to be vital when looking back on the meaning and themes of the text. He from the beginning was blamed for the fuku he left on the people of Santo Domingo and proved to slowly, but surely ruin Beli's, Oscar's, Lola's, Yuniors, and La Inca's lives. Diaz was able to add a more useful visual in a unique way because of his use of cultural references.

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Lit Engagements

3/13/2018

Essay 2

The Addition of Tupac Shakur to the Third World Canon of Literature

I believe Tupac and his poem “Life Through My Eyes” should be added to the Third-World canon of literature. I’d define the Third World canon of literature as hardships that a minority group has had to go through based off the amount of discrimination against them and having to persevere through the inequality. The experiences and events Tupac has been through that he describes is what a lot of people around him have had to go through, not everyone has a good childhood and I think that’s the people he is connecting with in this poem. Tupac began his music career as a rebel with a cause to articulate the injustices endured by many African-Americans. His skill in doing so made him a spokesperson not just for his own generations but for the people who continue to face the same struggle for equality. This connects with what Gugelberger says about having to learn from the Third World writer how to consider what is really going on in the world and why it has been going on.

This poem is clearly the perspective of Tupac because it is called “life through my eyes” and is a simple rhyming 12 bar poem. Sadness, poverty, and the situation of the poor black inner-city

communities are very common themes in all his poems, but this poem goes further by illustrating how he sees others go through it and then explains how he himself then goes through it. Tupac also uses bad grammar to put the reader in his mindset and help show the way Tupac processes information and then conveys it to others, through simplicity and rhymes but also his trademark number 2 and improperly spelled words. This poem conveys sad imagery and wording that makes the reader feel trapped as Tupac is himself. Tupac shows by saying: "poverty,murder,violece/and never a moment 2 rest/Fun and games are few/but treasured like gold 2 me/cuz I realize that I must return/2 my spot in poverty". In these lines Tupac is talking about the violence in his neighborhood and saying he has no time to rest because he can't. It shows that he has little leisure time since he is in lives in an impoverished community, but when he does get time to spend it with the people he loves he cherishes every second of it. Showing he cares about him and the people around him, which is a reoccurring theme in his poems. It is hard for me to connect with this poem because I didn't grow up with as harsh as a childhood as Tupac. I could even be the "square" who is scared to death by what he has seen and gone through. But what I do understand is growing poor, I've always had to worry about money my whole life and I've always seen my mom stressed out about money. I grew up the youngest of three kids and my mom was a single parent who would worked day and night off just to keep us afloat. I know even with the hardships I've gone through are nothing like what Tupac writes in his poems, but if there was one thing id relate to its being poor.

The point of the third world canon is to include works of writing that show different points of view, the truth about the wretched. In Gugelberg's 'Decolonizing the Canon: Considerations of Third World Literature' he says: "The issue then is not to integrate Third World literary works into the canon but to identify with "the wretched of the earth" and to learn from them--to learn from the Third World writer how to look into what is really going on in the world and why it has been going

on and thus to learn about our own limitations". I believe Tupac did just this with his "Life Through My Eyes" poem when he writes: "Life through my bloodshot eyes/would scare a square 2 death/poverty,murder,violence/and never a moment 2 rest". He's writing to the people who haven't experienced what he has had to go through and wants the same equality as everyone else. I think this because of the first two lines, "Life through my bloodshot eyes would scare a square 2 death". I looked up what he meant by referring to people as "squares" and it was described as "a person considered to be old-fashioned or boringly conventional". Tupac isn't only writing about his experiences, he is writing about the experiences the African-American culture in a whole has had to endure.

Tupac constantly writes about the hardships he and his community have gone through and shows love for the people around him. Because of this, his writing should be added to the Third-World canon. Gugelberg reiterates that it's important to learn the problem and possibly the solution from the writing, and that's exactly what Tupac does in this poem. This poem shows that Tupac ultimately wants to use his popularity to help end the poverty in his community and other communities like his and realizes he can use his voice and be a spokesman for his people. He ends the poem with what seems like hope, if he can make it out of poverty then his goals and dreams can be accomplished.

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Lit engagements

Essay #3

Lasting effects of Stereotype threat

One social issue I want to focus on throughout this book is stereotype threat against women. There are many sexist remarks when it comes to women that are belittling to their role in society. According to Wikipedia, "Stereotype threat is a situational predicament where people feel themselves to be at risk of conforming to stereotypes about their social group". A strong example of this in *A Raisin In the Sun* is how Walter constantly shoots down the idea of Beneatha becoming a doctor and told her to take a more stereotypical role in society for women at the time.

Stereotype threat is very important in this book because it walks hand and hand with the title '*A Raisin in the Sun*'. Langston Hughes discusses the idea of unfulfilled dreams in his poem "Harlem", and uses symbolism and imagery to describe possible outcomes. Hughes, first describes a deferred dream to a raisin that has been sitting in the sun because much like a deferred dream, a dried raisin has had its life sucked out of it. Throughout the book stereotype threat is deferring her dreams of becoming a doctor. This is shown when Walter says, "Who

the hell told you you had to be a doctor? If you so crazy 'bout messing 'round / with sick people then go be a nurse like other women or just get / married and be quiet..." (1.1.125) Here it shows Walter belittling Beneatha's dreams of becoming a doctor and telling her to conform and be a what every woman grew up to be at the time.

The idea of failed dreams wasn't only a popular theme in the book, but as well in the historical context. During the mid-1900's is when the American Dream concept spread throughout the United States. This is true when talking about the household because it is a household of failed dreams. Walter is the one that struggles the most with his failed dreams and constantly puts down his wife for being a woman. Walter reiterates putting down his wife for being a woman by saying, "...See there, that just goes to show you what women understand / about the world. Baby, don't *nothing* happen for / you in this world 'less you pay somebody off!" (1.1.81) Walter says the need for money is a man's thing and just because Ruth is a girl she wouldn't understand that. This is Walter trying to cope with his own failed dreams. He has to put others down like his wife in order to make himself feel more powerful.

Women are still being affected by stereotype threat today. One major problem that fuels the stereotype threats today are the negative workplace environments. Andrea Kramer and Alton Harris reinforce this idea by saying, "the workplace is a minefield of negative stereotypes for women. This minefield exists because success in business and the professions — being perceived as a leader, effective negotiator, strong advocate, and keen evaluator — involves performing tasks associated with positive male stereotypes and negative female ones." Women are most affected by stereotype threat when it comes to leadership roles. In a study done by Von Hiller, "150 university students participated in an experiment on leadership potential. They undertook a leadership test that was either described as producing gender differences (stereotype threat), or producing no gender differences (control). Results showed that women

suffered performance decrements in the stereotype threat condition". For stereotype threat to be ended, it must be addressed. The problem is women are not being treated equally in the workplace. Men today still get paid more than women for the same jobs causes a gap between, according to the National Committee on Pay Equity, men are paid in a year what women are paid in a year, four months and four days. Until women and men are created equal in the work environment, stereotype threats will continue. One way that stereotype threat can be drastically reduced is to educate ourselves about it. Its up to men to make it known because men are not negatively affected, but I'm sure the women that they love is. if men start talking about the issues it causes in the work place then maybe we can start taking steps towards a more balanced workplace.

Stereotype threat was an important social issue when *A Raisin in the Sun* was published, and it continues to be one today. For stereotype threat to be ended, it must be addressed. Beneatha got one opportunity to fulfil her dream and it wasn't a sure thing, but she took it because she would do anything, including going to live in a completely new country, to fulfill her dream. Women need to be strong like Beneatha was and ignore what other people say you can't do because It worked out for her and she never gave up.

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Lit Engagements

Essay #4

Connections to the Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao themes connect with many of the other literature we have read this year. Oscar Wao and sweat both show stories of relationships that are toxic from the start and end up having a major effect on both stories. *The Pit and the Pendulum* and Oscar Wao share the theme of death and close calls, both stories being riddled with both. As

well as being able to personally relate to Oscar and the relationship Beli and Oscar have through similar experiences.

The Pit and the Pendulum and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* have similar connections of death and close calls. The connection between these two stories are a subjective experience because not many people come inches from death, or have to fear death. Death is a vital theme in *The Pit and the Pendulum*, the pendulum hangs over the character in the form of the pendulum. Death is even brought up in the first line, where he introduces he was "sick unto death". Likewise, in Oscar Wao death was a vital theme to the story. Oscar's whole life comes down to walking the line with death and then ultimately crossing that line. *The Pit and the Pendulum* is meant to be a scary story by describing the walls as "slimy" and there being mice running around. It also makes you think what would you do in that scary situation. Similar to Oscar Wao, when Oscar is dragged into the field and gets the life beaten out of him and he's just left there to die, it made me ask the same question, what would I do in that situation. In both Oscar Wao when he is being dragged to the corn fields, and in *the Pit and the Pendulum*, where the main character is tied down awaiting death, they are both helpless and left to wonder.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao and *Sweat* were similar in the sense of how the gangster treated Beli and how Sykes treated Delia. Neither the gangster nor Sykes treated their woman with respect. Sykes never gives Delia respect and has another girl who he had an affair with. Delia clearly gets no respect when she says, "Looka heah, Sykes, you done gone too fur. Ah been married to you fur fifteen years, and Ah been takin' in wahsin' fur fifteen years. Sweat, sweat, sweat! Work and sweat, cry and sweat, pray and sweat!". And the response Sykes gives, "What's that got to do with me?". Clearly he doesn't care about Delia because he would be willing to lose her. The gangster, similar to Sykes, has another girl besides Beli who he is actually married to. The gangster treats Beli horribly, but Beli doesn't realize it until she is

pregnant with his kid and he is not happy about it. These two stories have an eerily similar ending of death, or near death. In Sykes case, he gets what is coming and dies by a snake bite and even though Delia hears him yelling for help she doesn't do anything. Beli was dragged out to a field and beat to a pulp by people the gangsters wife hired to beat the baby out of her. Even though the gangster probably could have helped her, he doesn't and leaves her and the baby to die. In both cases, the love was not reciprocated and ended up costing Sykes, and Beli's baby's lives.

I can personally connect to Oscar and the connection him and Beli have. Much like Oscar I am the youngest one in the family and therefore, makes me the mommas boy. Also like Oscar, I have a sibling like Lola who is always arguing and disobeying every rule. I have sympathy for Oscar in this situation and I believe that's why I connected so much with the first section of the book describing Oscars family life. Oscars crazy family is displayed perfectly when Diaz writes, "We jumped on each other and the table fell and the sancocho spilled all over the floor and Oscar just stood in the corner bellowing, Stop it, stop it, stop it!"(63). When I read this I flashed back to a few times where I had to yell stop multiple times because my mom and brother were yelling so fiercely at each other. As I went back to re-read the sentence I felt my young self yelling "stop it, stop it, stop it!".

Making connections between literature can be important to dive more into important issues. For example, how we treat women. The toxic relationships both Delia and Beli had changed their lives forever and not for the better. Making connections between themes also helps understand the stories in more depth then you did before.