

*Pursuing Social Justice through
Conversations between Course Readings
and the Real World*

LTF 2021-22

SITUATION:

In my R1A and R1B classes (discussion-oriented), I have frequently noticed that many students feel that issues such as racism, or gender inequality, or Islamophobia, happened “back then,” even when Black Lives Matter, the #metoo movement, or President Trump’s “Muslim ban” were the leading news headlines. This outlook that we live in a post-racist, post-sexist, or post-feminist world leads to the mistaken assumption that diversity, equity, and inclusion have already been achieved in the socio-cultural spaces that we inhabit, and no further individual or community initiatives are particularly necessary.

PROPOSED SOLUTION:

A set of **exercises/assignments (individual & collaborative)** that instructors in the **humanities, fine arts, and social sciences** can use to stimulate students to **make connections between their course readings and the real world** and be cognizant of the ongoing need for our collective efforts to **actively work towards social justice** in our communities and foster a culture of equity and inclusion.

** All the assignments on the following pages share the goal of capturing the students’ reflections on their own conceptual change, if any, on contemporary issues before and after doing the assigned reading as well as outside research. Additional learning outcomes include developing students’ critical thinking, research skills, and writing skills, as well as boosting peer interaction. The assignments can be used in any class that includes readings on topical issues that instructors would like students to connect with their lived experiences and/or build awareness of social justice issues.

Discussion Post

Students should write a discussion post (around 400-500 words) that connects the course reading for any given week to an article published within the last 5 years that they found on **reliable online news outlets** such as *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *BBC News*, *Al Jazeera*, *Reuters*, etc. The post should **summarize the topic and main point/s of the article and connect them in a logical way to one or more points from the course reading**. The post should make a strong, detailed case that the text and the article “speak” to each other in interesting ways and show how in a clear and logical manner.

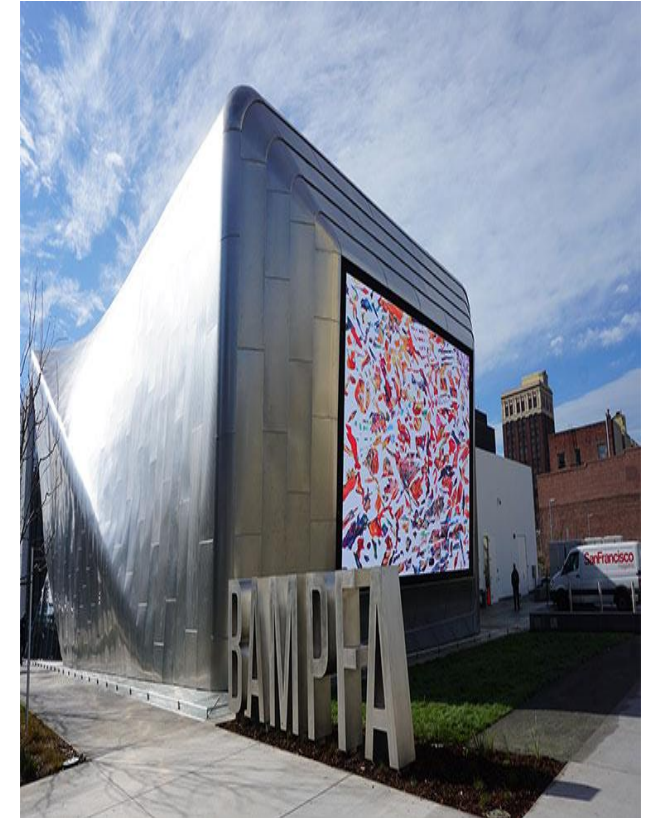
Students also need to **comment substantively on three other discussion posts** from their classmates on the day after the deadline for the discussion post: they can add to/elaborate on other students’ posts, state their opinion on other students’ comments, connect other posts to any other part of the reading/other readings/pop culture/etc.



Museum Visit

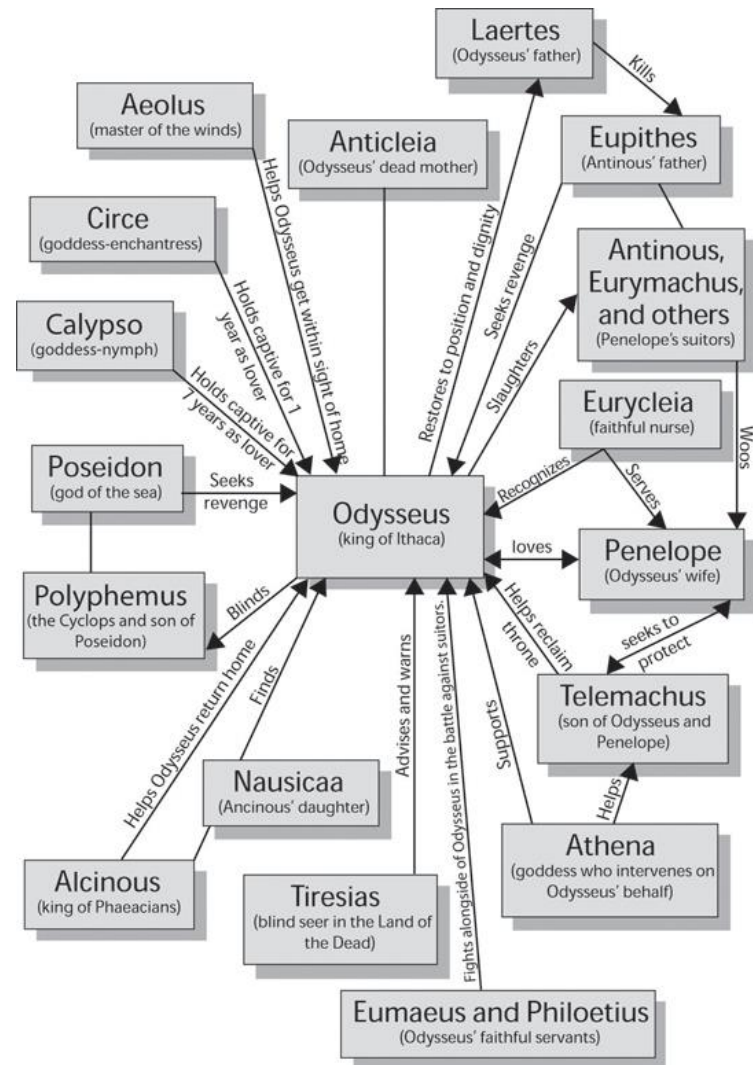
Students should visit a museum (any Bay area museum that is convenient for them to access—the BAMPFA and OMCA might be the most accessible) and find one or more artifact/s that ties in with topics discussed in class. The artifact/s should represent relevant historical/present day incidents that relate to the course reading.

- This could be **a short essay, a lightning talk, or a group presentation** and can be done individually, in pairs, or in small groups.
- If students visit the museum on their own, they should take selfies at the museum and with their chosen artifact/s. If the class goes on a field trip with the instructor, this won't be necessary.
- This could also be a virtual museum visit, since so many new options are now available due to the Covid-19 pandemic, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York City), Art Institute of Chicago, etc.
- Instructors should set the stage by
 - Liaising with the education offices at these institutions/getting free passes for students.
 - Due to the social justice framework of these assignments, establishing the potentially complicated role of museums regarding the curation, acquisition, and appropriation of artifacts will contextualize the experience for students.



Concept Mapping

Students should use draw.io to build concept maps—this can be an individual or a collaborative (if so, use diagrams.net) project. Students should map connections found in the text that they are reading to similar ideas in the news/social media/YouTube videos, etc. The focus still needs to be on “real” experiences, so although the connections do not need to be restricted to a particular kind of source, the credibility of the source needs to be verified by students. For instance, if the class is reading about police brutality against black people in the United States, students can link to Facebook live videos (recorded), YouTube testimonies, op-ed articles, etc.



Annotating in Hypothes.is or a Wiki

As an alternative to the concept mapping activity described on the previous slide, students can collaboratively (or individually) annotate the text using Hypothes.is or a similar website. Connections could be links to present day occurrences of similar events/ideas with a brief 1-2-sentence summary of the article/other source. Only academically credible sources should be allowed.

Lieberman's [new book](#) *Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect* hits the shelves this month. It's a book about relationships and why relationships are a central—though increasingly absent—part of a flourishing life. Lieberman draws on psychology and neuroscience research to confirm what Aristotle asserted long ago in his *Politics*: "Man is by nature a social animal ... Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god."

New book uses recent research to confirm Aristotle's theory that people need to be social.

Just as human beings have a basic need for food and shelter, we also have a basic need to belong to a group and form relationships. The desire to be in a loving relationship, to fit in at school, to join a fraternity or sorority, to avoid rejection and loss, to see your friends do well and be cared for, to share good news with your family, to cheer on your sports team, and to check in on Facebook—these things motivate an incredibly impressive array of our thoughts, actions, and feelings.

Basic needs do not only consist of food and shelter. Relationships are a basic need, too.

Lieberman sees the brain as the center of the social self. Its primary purpose is social thinking. One of the great mysteries of evolutionary science is how and why the human brain got to be so large. Brain size generally increases with body size across the animal kingdom. Elephants have huge brains while mice have tiny ones. But humans are the great exception to this rule. Given the size of our bodies, our brains should be much smaller—but they are by far the largest in the animal kingdom relative to our body size. The question is why.

The brain is the key to socializing. Larger animals usually have larger brains, but based on body size, people should have smaller brains. Research suggests our brains are larger in order to socialize.

Scientists have debated this question for a long time, but the research of anthropologist Robin Dunbar is fairly conclusive on this point. Dunbar has found that the strongest predictor of a species' brain size—specifically, the size of its neocortex, the outermost layer—is the size of its social group. We have big brains in order to socialize. Scientists think the first hominids with brains as large as ours appeared about 600,000-700,000 years ago in Africa. Known as *Homo heidelbergensis*, they are believed to be the ancestors of *Homo sapiens* and the Neanderthals. Revealingly, they appear to be the first hominids to have had division of labor (they worked together to hunt), central campsites, and they may have been the first to bury their dead.

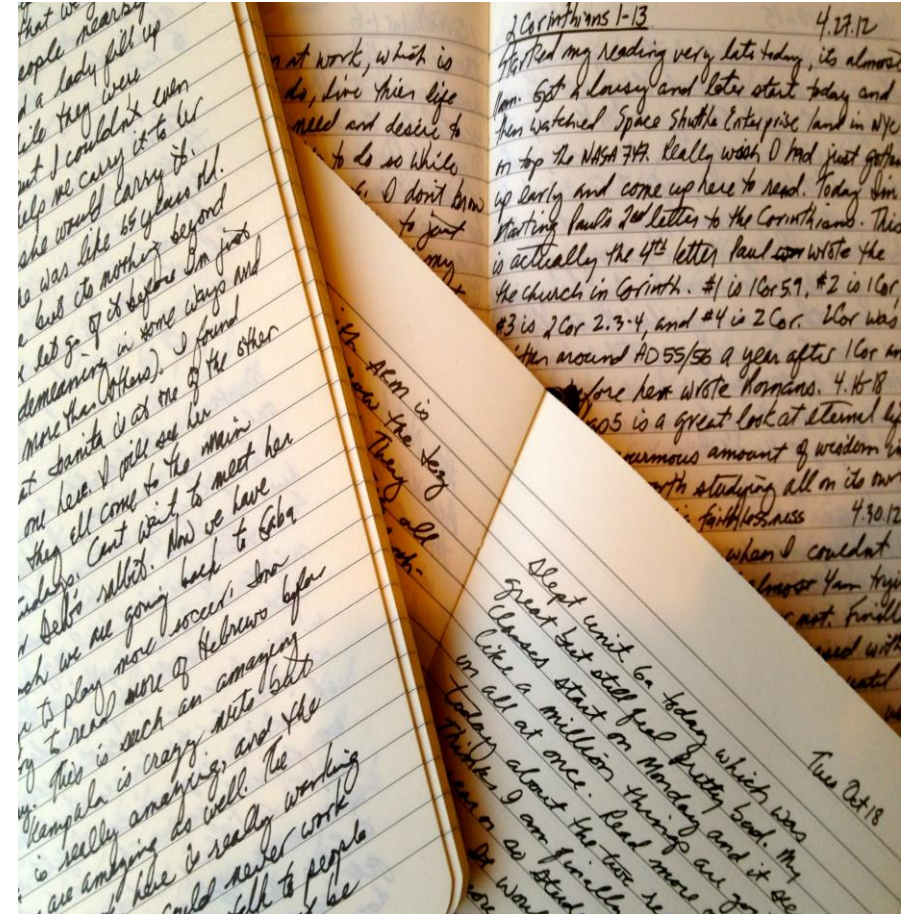
Thick “ethnographic” descriptions

- Students should attend events that are relevant to class readings—such as attending the Women’s March or march against climate change in conjunction with reading about feminism, women’s rights, global warming, etc.—and write thick “ethnographic” descriptions of these events to facilitate experiential learning of the ideas taught in the classroom.
 - Research the event before attending. How is it advertised? What are its main goals?
 - At the event, conduct 3 short interviews: Why are you here? What do you think needs to change? How do these topics affect you personally and your friends/family?
 - Observations: What types of people attend the event? What kinds of signs do we see (colors, phrases, languages used)? What types of symbolism do we see?
- Possible variations (or additions) could involve inviting guest speakers (Zoom or in-person) with whom students could have a brief Q&A session and/or inviting student organizations to speak in class and students could conduct interviews/have a Q&A session with the organization.
- This activity can be framed as in service to UCB’s history of student protests in the 1960s, such as the Free Speech Movement, the anti-war protests, etc.



Journaling

- 1) The main thematic elements of the texts under discussion in any given week should be shared with students **before** they are assigned the reading.
- 2) Students should maintain a weekly journal that captures their thoughts on those themes, such as sexual harassment, or the male gaze, or colonialism, that includes **two entries**, one **before** doing the course readings and one **after** reading the assigned text/s. Students should identify how the theme intersects with their own lives or the lives of their friends/family members. When applicable, students can also trace how older family members managed these issues and how the students navigate these issues in the present day. This will be the **personal angle** of engagement with the course reading/s.
- 3) The “before” entry can be relatively brief but the “after” entry should be more detailed. For the second entry, students should also be asked to conduct some basic research and find two articles that show how these themes affect people’s lives in the present day. They should cite and integrate these articles into their own journal entry **after** doing the course readings.



Updating the story

- Students should adapt or update a scene from a fictional text with a creative narrative that refracts similar issues (race, discrimination, etc.) through a contemporary lens. For example, if the Tom Robinson trial in *To Kill a Mockingbird* was set in 2022, how would it end? Students should cite news or other sources (as many as they desire) that document their research. It should be an evidence-based project and not one based just on personal opinion. (Note: The sources should be cited at the end and not necessarily integrated into the write-up since this is meant to be a creative writing assignment.)
- Alternative assignment: Students who might not be interested in creative writing can write an essay that discusses/forecasts the generational consequences for a particular fictional event/situation. What will the ramifications be of a particular historical injustice, such as slavery if the class is reading Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, for example, through time? Once again, students would need to cite news or other credible sources to support their claims regarding real occurrences of these generational aftereffects.

CS291873

UPDATED CLASSIC



'ALICE THROUGH THE YOU TUBE'