

Office of General Education

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**World Humanities Summer 2022 Assessment Report – Part I**

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| Date of report: | August 30, 2022 |
| Course: | World Humanities 10100 and World Humanities 10200 |
| Date/semester of assessment: | Part I: Summer 22 |
| Assessment Team Members: | Václav Paris, Daniel Gustafson, English |
| Coordination / Oversight: | Ana Vasovic, General Education |

**Purpose and Justification**

This two-part project aims to (1) review the course alignment with Pathways learning outcomes and ensure a smooth transition between course coordinators from Václav Paris to Daniel Gustafson, and

(2) through instructor feedback, examine the effectiveness of course activities on student learning in relation to Pathways learning outcomes.

**Course Overview**

WHUM 10100 and 10200 satisfy the World Cultures and Global Issues (WCGI) – Literature requirement of the CUNY Pathways Common Core.

**Course descriptions**:

WHUM 10100: World Humanities I

An introduction to world literature and its relationship to the traditions and societies from which it springs. Study of major works from antiquity to the seventeenth century. 3 cr.

WHUM 10200: World Humanities II

An introduction to world literature and its relationship to the traditions and societies which it springs. Study of major works from the eighteenth century to the contemporary period. 3hr./wk.; 3 cr.

**Course format:**

WHUM courses are offered as small section classes (limit 25 students). In spring 2022, there were 25 sections (12 sections for 101 and 12 sections of 102, as well as one section of 103 offered at the honors level).

Since fall 2020, sections have been standardized and offered in a hybrid model with recorded lectures. A full-time faculty member is appointed as the course coordinator and small sections are taught by mainly PT faculty with a few FT faculty.

Each week, students are expected to watch pre-recorded asynchronous lectures. The lecture materials involve a series of videos, occasional links to other media, possible discussion questions or activities for students, and mandatory weekly multiple-choice quizzes on the lectures/readings. On average, these materials take up about the period of one class session (75 minutes). This material is prepared in advance by the course coordinator, with assistance from several guest lecturers.

Each week students also attend one 75-min discussion class period with their individual section instructor. Depending on class format (some sections are entirely online), the discussion section are either in person or online. These 75 minutes are focused on student engagement and discussion of the texts and the lecture materials. Discussion sections are not a forum for more lecturing.

Other than the quizzes, which are self-grading on Blackboard, all grading for the class is done by the section instructors. Section instructors decide on how their section’s grading is to be divided within mandated guidelines. Instructors are required to follow this distribution of grade percentages for their individual sections:

* Participation 10%
* Weekly multiple-choice quizzes (10 questions/points each) 20-30% (automatically graded on Blackboard).
* Graded writing assignments, formal essays, and/or exams 60-70%

**Additional comments on format:**

Based on findings and recommendations from June 2016 [assessment](https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/WHUM%20assessment%20report%20spring%202016.doc), the following changes were implemented in the course:

* Smaller class sizes. The shift to a hybrid model of instruction has allowed for class sizes to be reduced (before fall 2020, class sizes were up to almost 50 students per class). The hybrid model has allowed this number to be halved because instead of teaching one section twice a week for 3 credits, each instructor teaches 2 sections each once a week for the same number of credits.
* Greater involvement of FT faculty. The fact that a FT course coordinator is now in charge of WHUM10100 and WHUM10200 means that at least half of the course, for each student, is taught by a knowledgeable full-time faculty member with experience.
* Feasible financial model: the course in this format saves money for the college, as instructors are appointed 1.5 hrs for each section they teach.
* Standardization across all sections: before this shift, each course within World Humanities was taught independently using a loosely standardized syllabus. Now all sections have the same materials at the same time and some assignments are graded across the board equally. Quizzes are the same for all sections.
* Pooling of resources: There is an option for section leaders to share materials through the course Dropbox and through email with other instructors. All instructors also receive a packet of information, including a sample syllabus and model assignments from the coordinator at the beginning of the semester.
* Awareness of Pathways WCGI learning outcomes. At the beginning of the semester, the course coordinator provides all instructors with the learning outcomes, the CCNY Gen Ed Faculty Handbook, Guidelines for the course, and a sample syllabus, each of which stresses the need for the course instruction and evaluation to follow WCGI outcomes.
* Greater coordination between courses. Since one coordinator now runs WHUM10100 and WHUM10200, there is a much greater follow-on between these two courses.
* Writing days: following the suggestion of the June 2016 assessment, there are now two weeks in each semester dedicated to the discussion and practice of writing in both WHUM10100 and WHUM10200. These occur at the midterm and at the end of the semester. While it is up to the individual instructors of sections to identify what aspects of student writing in their section most need to be addressed, the course coordinator provides possible useful materials (such as templates from *They Say / I Say*) to all instructors. These periods can also be used for exam preparation or peer review.

**Part I Assessment Findings (Vaclav Paris, June 2022)**

The following six paragraphs offer specific examples of how the updated World Humanities courses address these outcomes one by one. This is from the perspective of the coordinator of the course, and hence focuses mostly on the syllabus and the lectures.

1. *Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view.*

It is an objective that is fulfilled already by the choice of texts that students are required to read and which appear on the syllabus for the course. WHUM101, for example, begins with a series of creation myths from different sources, alongside the Bible. This material shows students how different peoples in history have thought about the origins of the world. In WHUM102, students read texts that relate to the broad changes brought about by modernity and colonization, from multiple points of view – including for example a West-African perspective in Things Fall Apart or a Korean perspective in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*.

*2. Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically.*

As with 1, this is also a very general objective addressed ubiquitously across the course. Most of the material in WHUM101 and 102 is fictional. Reading these texts students are asked not to believe them uncritically as historical documents, but to evaluate how they construct a world and corresponding attitudes. Reading the *Odyssey* in WHUM101, for instance, the lectures and associated discussion prompts and quizzes do not involve questions of the “truth” of Odysseus’s voyage, but, for instance, of what Homer is trying to teach the listener about Ancient Greek mores, such as the custom of “*xenia*” or hospitality. The same is true for the course’s approach to texts more generally not classified as fiction. In WHUM101 we read the Hebrew Bible as literature, i.e., as a text that produces meaning and needs to be analyzed critically or analytically and historically in relation to evidence about the place and time of its composition, not as a text whose meaning is given divinely. Likewise, in WHUM102, when students read the autobiography of the ex-slave Mary Prince, the lecture and quiz and discussion prompts (provided at the end of the lecture) ask students to think about and discuss the ways in which Mary Prince uses rhetoric in her story to strengthen her position and to convince readers of the necessity of abolition. One of the model activities that are provided by the coordinator to instructors of WHUM 102 is to look in small groups at specific examples of Mary Prince’s wordchoice: that is to analyze in close detail how she mobilizes her evidence into an argument.

*3. Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions.*

Lectures include short writing prompts for students, asking them to articulate a position on a particular question about the text read using evidence from the lecture. In the lecture on Romanticism for WHUM102, for instance, students are asked to pause the video lecture at several moments and to write short personal responses to given questions. Likewise, at the end of the lecture on the *Tale of Genji*, for instance, students are asked to write a paragraph response to one of the following questions: “1. Is it the ”first novel”? 2. To what extent can we sympathize with Genji or the values of the book? 3. To what extent can we understand *The Tale of Genji* at all?” These questions are designed to shape the discussion sections of the class, in which students then produce and practice oral arguments about the text.

Most of the written work for this class takes place not in connection to the lectures but in connection to the discussion sections and is overseen by the instructors of individual sections. The exact format for how this is done is up to the instructors. All instructors are provided with examples of essay or Blackboard discussion prompts, which are designed to facilitate students producing arguments with evidence supporting conclusions.

*4. Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of world literature.*

The course applies the methods of comparative literature throughout – e.g. close reading, historicization, comparison of attitudes and values, application of theoretical heuristics to various texts. The primary concept or method used within class discussions is that of close reading. Instructors facilitate students’ close attention to the text along with the identification of key themes and frictions within texts. One of the central aims of world literature is to arrive at a view of literary history that is broader than the limited perspectives offered by national canons. Therefore, instead of thinking about Romanticism in World Humanities 102, for instance, only from the perspective of English literature, reading only the English Romantics, the course lecture introduces this movement as international, beginning in Germany and affecting many parts of the world in different ways, including in relation to the Haitian Revolution. World Literature is itself a discipline whose fundamental concepts are borrowed from other interdisciplinary fields – including anthropology, foreign languages, cultural studies, ethnic studies, geography, and history. Just in relation to these last two, it is worth noting that every lecture for both courses begins by situating the text or texts under discussion in both time and space. So, for instance, the lectures on the *Odyssey* begin by explaining where and when they were composed (in the Ancient Greek world, around 800 BC). The texts are arranged chronologically. In this way, over the course of the semester, students are asked to relate their close readings and discussions in class to both a broad historical context and a broad geographical understanding. Students thus gain a sense of both the variety of world literature as well as its evolution over the past few thousand years.

*5. Analyze culture, globalization, or global cultural diversity, and describe an event or process from more than one point of view.*

In World Humanities 101 the key event or process that is considered is the self-representation of different cultures in their diversity as they emerge. The course asks: how does a culture come to represent its own values, beliefs, history, tradition, specificity through its early literary works. So, for example: how is the *Tale of Genji* representing the world of 11th century Japan? This process of literary self-representation is considered from many different perspectives. The course covers creation myths, the Bible, the *Odyssey*, the *Inferno*, Shakespeare’s *Othello* and other texts – each of which can be considered as a kind of national epic, in the sense that they articulate the foundational values of different civilizations and allow students to see how cultures differ.

The central process considered in World Humanities 2 is similar, although much more closely tied to the key word “globalization.” Beginning around the year 1800, WHUM10200 is, in many ways a course that looks at how modernity and coloniality, a.k.a. globalization, have affected different parts of the world and different cultures in different ways. Students read, for instance, the account of Mary Prince, who was born into slavery during the height of Atlantic slave trade. Later in the course, students also look at how colonialism looked from the imagined perspective of a Igbo village in *Things Fall Apart.* Each text offers its own perspective on how the world is changing in the period after 1800; in this sense each text offers at least one different point of view on the same general event or process.

*6. Analyze and discuss the role that race, ethnicity, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, belief, or other forms of social differentiation play in world cultures or societies.*

The key points of discussion in all of the lectures and in the class discussion prompts for these courses relate to the keywords here: race, ethnicity, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, and belief systems. In reading Shakespeare’s *Othello* in WHUM10100,for instance, students are introduced to ways in which Shakespeare represented race and asked to discuss the role that this plays in shaping the actions of different characters. The same is true in World Humanities 10200, for instance, when students read and discuss the work of James Baldwin and Zora Neale Hurston, which is very much about questioning the role that race plays in American society in the twentieth century. Throughout both courses, but especially in talking about *The Tale of Genji* in WHUM10100 (a text written by a woman), or about *The Doll’s House* or *Dictée* in WHUM10200, students demonstrate their understanding of gender by discussing the role played by the representation of women in the process of social differentiation.

**Conclusions/Recommendations – (Vaclav Paris, June 2022)**

The course in its current hybrid format offers a better education for students, including a better fulfillment of the aims of the WCGI label for all the reasons given in the “Additional comments on format” above. There are, however, still areas that might be developed:

* There is too much of a division between lectures and class writing. Future lectures need to be designed in a way that more fully involves or leads to student writing. This might take the form of shorter lectures with more activities interspersed within the lectures. Rather than just quizzes, students might be asked to produce paragraph-long written answers to single interpretative questions.
* There is little standardization of the ways in which students fulfill the writing requirements for the course. One way to including standardized writing assignments that address the WCGI aims in the sample syllabus that is provided to all instructors. Another option might be to introduce a standardized midterm and/or final exam for the course.
* The course readings could still be diversified further to address world cultures and global issues more completely: namely through a reduction of the number of European texts and an increase in a number of the texts from other parts of the world. World Humanities 101 might fruitfully include, for instance, a week on stories from the *Arabian Nights*.

**Follow up to recommendations /”Closing the Loop” Activities (Daniel Gustafson, August 2022)**

In response to Professor Paris’s assessment in Spring 2022, the course was revised during Summer 2022 by Professor Daniel Gustafson, who will coordinate it for AY 2022-2023. The division between the lectures and in-class writing was addressed by (1) allotting some time in the early video lectures of the semester for the lecturer to discuss/model close reading and analytical writing practice, and (2) by incorporating discussion questions into 8 of the weekly quizzes. These discussion questions ask the students to write 1-2 paragraphs on a given prompt tied to the week’s lecture, and to use the methods and models for analytical writing that the lecturer reviewed in the early videos. Detailed handouts and models for writing improvement were also made part of the students’ reading and made available for the instructors to use. The quizzes now are geared more towards practicing analysis and argument.

Many of the lecture videos have been updated in terms of form and content. The majority of lecture videos have been made shorter (e.g. instead of a 45-min. video, students will watch a series three separate 15-min. videos). Certain lecture videos (3 weeks’ worth in WHUM 102, and 8 weeks’ worth in WHUM 101) have been entirely redone in terms of either content and/or presentation of content. This was done for two reasons: (1) to make the class readings go better together and give the students better opportunities to practice analyzing global cultures and issues from different points of view, and (2) to incorporate more global diversity in terms of readings. For example, now in WHUM 101, instead of mostly readings by European writers, readings now span from Africa, India, Guatemala, the Middle East, and China. These changes likewise bring the class closer to the actual methods of the academic study of world literature as it is practiced as a scholarly field today.

Lastly, instructors have been provided with a greater array of resources to help them plan discussion and assignments, and to help familiarize them with the texts. Resources include sample syllabi, low-stakes and formal writing activities (shared by FT faculty who have taught these courses before), and background readings on and suggestions for discussion of many of the texts.

**Part II Assessment**

The assessment form on the following page has been designed for instructors of sections of World Humanities, not for the course coordinator. The questions have been adapted, consequently, to inquire into what happens during discussions and student writing activities, not to what happens in the assignment of readings or in the lectures (which is discussed above Part 1 – Assessment Findings).

An example of how this teaching reflection might be filled in is provided below, on pages 7-9.

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| **Teaching reflection – WHUM**  This activity asks instructors to consider how their course activities connect to Pathways General Education outcomes. Instructors will consider how their presentation of disciplinary concepts interplays (or can interplay) with broad ideas (outcomes) of the particular General Education category.  Please complete this document candidly. It is understandable if sometimes disciplinary concepts took away from other outcomes. The goal of this activity is to reflect and, if needed, adjust for future instruction. | | | |
| WCGI Learning Outcomes | What activities or assignments did you include that address this outcome? Please include specific examples. | How did students demonstrate their ability or lack of ability regarding the outcome? How was their success in acquiring the ability determined/measured? Please include specific examples. | Overall, how did the students do? Please comment on strength they exhibited and or challenges they encountered. Is there something you plan to do differently next time you teach in order to provide more opportunities/ support for students to demonstrate knowledge related to this outcome? |
| Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view. |  |  |  |
| Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically. |  |  |  |
| Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions. |  |  |  |
| Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of world literature exploring world cultures or global issues. |  |  |  |
| Analyze culture, globalization, or global cultural diversity, and describe an event or process from more than one point of view. |  |  |  |
| Analyze and discuss the role that race, ethnicity, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, belief, or other forms of social differentiation play in world cultures or societies. |  |  |  |
| **Teaching reflection – WHUM – Example filled in by Václav Paris, with examples from both WHUM101 and WHUM102. For each box in each column (except the third) there are two examples of possible answers. The top answer in each box in column 1 corresponds with the top answer in each box column 2.**  This activity asks instructors to consider how their course activities connect to Pathways General Education outcomes. Instructors will consider how their presentation of disciplinary concepts interplays (or can interplay) with broad ideas (outcomes) of the particular General Education category.  Please complete this document candidly. It is understandable if sometimes disciplinary concepts took away from other outcomes. The goal of this activity is to reflect and, if needed, adjust for future instruction. | | | |
| WCGI Learning Outcomes | What activities or assignments did you include that address this outcome? Please include specific examples. | How did students demonstrate their ability or lack of ability regarding the outcome? How was their success in acquiring the ability determined/measured? Please include specific examples. | Overall, how did the students do? Please comment on strength they exhibited and or challenges they encountered. Is there something you plan to do differently next time you teach in order to provide more opportunities/ support for students to demonstrate knowledge related to this outcome? |
| Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view. | In WHUM 101, students read and discuss in class creation myths: The Huron Creation Myth (from a historical account), The Creation Hymn from the Rig Veda, and Genesis chapters 1-9 from the Old Testament, each depicting the origin of the world.  *Alternative answer:*  Reading *Othello* together in class, and discussing how Shakespeare differentiates characters and their motives, provided an opporitunity to analyze stories from perspectives of different characters | In a midterm essay prompt, students were asked to compare two different creation myths, responding to the specific question: how do these two different myths represent the origin of mankind, and what different values do they reveal? The assignment measured the success of students gathering and assessing information from various sources (two different myths) and from various points of view by asking them to isolate particular relevant passages and to engage in the work of comparison. Students for instance, considered the difference in the role played by women in Genesis and in the Huron myth of creation.  *Alternative answer:*  Working in small groups, students were asked to narrate the story of the text from the perspective of a different character – Iago, Othello, Desdemona, Cassio. Students were expected to gather material relating to the experience of that character, interpreting the text from their partiucular point of view. The small groups then shared their different readings of events in a full-class discussion. | The students excelled. They were particularly strong at identifying relevant passages (gathering information) from the text and then establishing different potential readings.  In relation to almost all of the texts, I would stress more fully in future classes the difference between the perspective of the author of the text, the characters, and the modern-day reading. So for example, in relation to the *Inferno:* Dante’s authorial position is that of a medieval Catholic; the perspective of the characters in many cases is one of non-Cathlolic self-interest; the perspective of the modern day reader is one with a much greater distance typically without a religious investment. I would develop activities in which students identified the differences between these three perspectives, in groups, or in writing. In a future class, I’d like to make the emphasis on thinking about the difference between our own and historically (and geographically) distant cultures more of an explicit topic by switching out at least one of the Blackboard posts for a reflection on how public values are different in New York in 2022 from, say, in Dante’s time and how much of this difference is due to globalization. |
| Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically. | In relation to Kafka’s short stories, students discussed different possible readings – e.g. theological, psychoanalytic, Marxist, and identified evidence in support of each.  *Alternative answer:*  In the class discussion on *Things Fall Apart*, the instructor provided samples from three different critical essays on a particular passage from Chinua Achebe’s texts, which we read together. | One of the writing assignments for Kafka’s short stories asked students to respond to each others’ Blackboard posts, offering evaluation and suggestions for developing each others’ arguments into longer papers. This activity measured students’ ability to relate critical writing to the primary text, evaluating arguments analytically.  *Alternative answer:*  In relation to the sample critical essays on *Things Fall Apart*, students were asked to establish the claim of each of these essays by rewriting the author’s thesis statement, and then to evaluate its relative strength based on their own readings of *Things Fall Apart*. | While many students learned to produce effective detailed analytical close readings of texts in their Blackboard responses on Kafka, some students struggled to move beyond the summary of the text, failing to engage closely and hence critically with the text. In future classes I would spend more time at the beginning of the semester practicing close reading techniques, offering students examples of rich close readings, perhaps in the work of scholars of e.g. the *Odyssey*.    *Alternative answer:*  Students struggled to evaluate the value of critical essays on *Things Fall Apart*, often reducing the thesis statements to obvious claims rather than paying close attention to the detailed argument. In future classes, I would just give one exa,ple of a critical essay, rather than three, spending more time on it and making sure that students could follow the argument in detail. |
| Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions. | In the final class on the *Odyssey*, the instructor wrote on the board a series of possible argumentative claims, e.g.: “Odysseus is a violent murderer.” The students were asked to work in pairs to find evidence from the text either in support or against these claims.  *Alternative answer:*  The final exam for World Humanities 102 was an open book exam consisting of three questions that asked students to bring their knowledge to bear on a specific contentious issue. One question, for example, asked “Why does Cha use multiple media in *Dictée*? | After working in pairs discussing the claims that were on the board, e.g. . “Odysseus is a violent murderer,” each pair of students was asked to present their position.  *Alternative answer:*  In responding to questions on the final exam for WHUM102, such as “why does Cha use multiple media in *Dictée,*” students were evaluated partly on the ability to bring different examples to bear on the question, of e.g. different forms of media used by Cha. I would also look for clear claims about what Cha intended to do in her work (i.e. support for a conclusion). | Students learned to talk about and write about texts articulately and informedly. On the whole, however, students struggled to arrive at an original thesis either in their oral arguments or in their writing, or to adequately support this thesis with evidence from the text. In future classes I would scaffold the writing assignments for the discussion sections so as to provide students training in producing written arguments, moving up from close readings to thesis statements to using evidence to support conclusions. |
| Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of world literature exploring world cultures or global issues. | The fundamental concepts of world literature include the forms of narrative fiction – such as beginnings, endings, structure, rhyme schemes, dialogue etc. In each class, students were asked to identify the form or forms of the texts discussed – so for instance in the class on Dante’s Inferno, they were asked to look closely at the poem, recalling the lecture, and to identify the rhyme scheme that Dante used. | The class discussion on Dante included a period in which roles were reversed and individual students were asked to part of the class. The students showed their ability and familiarity with the concepts and methods of world literature by introducing the *Inferno* using the concepts that we had earlier discussed together.  *Alternative answer:*  One of the early online Blackboard writing prompts that students were asked to complete in World Humanities 101 was to do a close reading of a particular sentence in the Odyssey. | Students demonstrated their ability in their close readings by dentifying significant word choices, and showing an understanding of why the author had arranged the material in the way that they did. Close reading is a fundamental method of world literature – like thick description in anthropology – it is way of entering into the complexity and detail of expression at the most fine-detail level.  At the heart of world literature are the trademarks of formal analysis, close reading, and the comparative method. The activity on Dante tested students’ ability to apply formal analysis. On the whole students excelled at this, showing a clear ability to understand and apply basic concepts.  *Alternative answer:*  At the heart of world literature are the trademarks of formal analysis, close reading, and the comparative method. The writing prompt on the *Odyssey* asked students to demonstrate their abilities in close reading. While the students struggled with this activity at the beginning of the semester, often failing to move beyond summary or description of the text, by the end of the course, they had grown much more familiar with the general method, both in their contributions to in-class discussions as well as in their writing. |
| Analyze culture, globalization, or global cultural diversity, and describe an event or process from more than one point of view. | In the class on Romanticism, the students looked at several different poems that are labelled “romantic” and partake in the widescale cultural and historical event of romanticism. Working in small groups they were asked to analyze how each poem represented the romantic movement.  *Alternative answer:*  One of the final essay writing prompts suggested to students of this section of WHUM102 was to compare Gogol’s representation of the city with that of Kafka. The course as a whole describes a period of intense urbanization in the western world. Several of the writers represent this urbanization from different perspectives. | After working in small groups analyzing how each of the poems in Romanticism represented the romantic movement, students were asked to nominate a presenter. The presenter shared the group’s findings with the class, demonstrating their abilities to think about romanticism from different points of view / through different texts.  *Alternative answer:*  The writing prompt asking students to compare Gogol and Kafka’s representation of the city showed students ability to to analyze globalization from many points of view because it required them to think about two different histories (that of Prague and that of Saint Petersburg) stereoptically. It also, more generally, asked students to pay close attention to the role of the modern city in literature and the different ways it can be interpreted. | There are a number of themes and events that recur over the course of both WHUM101 and WHUM102 – such as the role of women in history, romanticism, globalization, and urbanization, which students brought up themselves in their discussion and in their writing. At the moment however, these themes are left to emerge almost at random. In future classes I would keep a running list of important keywords related to the WCGI outcomes, writing them on the blackboard, which, if we like, we can bring to bear in any discussion to see how each of the texts is responding to the gen ed focus of the course. |
| Analyze and discuss the role that race, ethnicity, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, belief, or other forms of social differentiation play in world cultures or societies. | In the class on Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, students were asked to highlight passages in the text which showed how Nora’s relation to her gender changed over the course of the play.  *Alternative answer:*  The discussion class on James Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues” for WHUM102 began with a quick writing prompt, in which students were asked to respond to the role played by race in Baldwin’s story. | After highlighting passages of *A Doll’s House* which showed how Nora’s relation to her gender changes, students were asked to reflect on how gender expectations continue to shape people’s lives and to play a role in contemporary culture. Their ability to do this was evaluated in an in-class discussion asking them to compare and contrast women’s roles today with the situation of womem in Ibsen’s play.  *Alternative answer:*  I collected in the quick writing prompts on “Sonny’s Blues,” and although they were not graded, I used the answers to evaluate students’ ability to identify the role of race in different narratives. Although Baldwin’s story isn’t explicitly about race, in fact, an act of racial violence is behind all of the events. Student’s ability to recognize the role played by race in Baldwin’s depiction of American society was also assessed in the following class discussion, which drew on the writing prompt. | In general, students showed an excellent awareness of the roles played by race and gender in many different classes, specifically in those on texts written by people of colour and women authors or on themes explicitly related to underprivileged groups. In relation to *A Doll’s House*, for instance, students argued vibrantly about whether Ibsen could be classed as a “proto-“ feminist, or whether in fact, his depiction of Nora and her struggle misrepresented the early battle for women’s rights.  Students also proved very articulate in identifying racial discrimation and racial violence in works such as Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues.”  Much less attention was paid to categories of ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation, partly because to pay attention to these parameters of social differentiation may have been in most cases to miss the more important meaning of a text. In a future course, however, I would include a writing activity for thinking about the role of class in Gogol’s writings (in WHUM102) or about how class is represented in the *Tale of Genji*. |