

## Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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During the course of my studies, I was most fascinated by the encounter with the approach to literature as text and context which are situated within those of a particular society, its politics, and its history, and therefore as an unfinished field of construction and contestation. This was an eye-opening experience to me, because if literature is a site of cultural, social, and political construct and contest, writing and reading literature can re-describe conventions, explore new possibilities, create new meanings, and destabilize the compulsory and oppressive social discourses, practices, and institutions. When teaching, I want to share with my students the inspiration and pleasure I derive from literature studies, and to study literature with them to grow as cultural and social critics.

Teaching literature requires a combination of familiarizing ourselves with important and interesting texts of literature, of reflecting upon the ways in which we read and study literature, and drawing connections of literature, self, and society. Students of my course of literature will gain familiarity with canonical literary texts as well as with non-canonical texts. They will gain some experience in reading theoretical texts, which serve as useful and practical tools in reading and critiquing literature. Because literature is an interdisciplinary endeavor, students will be encouraged to explore various theoretical approaches to literature and to understand historical, political, and institutional positions from which we read and study literature.

Teaching literature poses challenges in the contemporary age, when the visual media, such as photograph, film, television, and theater as means of communication have gained aggressive advocates, who emphasize the immediacy and efficacy of a form of communication that is beyond words and beyond the linearity of verbal writing. On the pedagogical front, there is also a sense that students prefer to look at visuals (films, slides) rather than read texts in order to know the people and the world. Given this social, scholarly, and pedagogical situation, literary studies gain new importance as an inquisitive activity and are all the more important because of (and not in spite of) the efficacy and immediacy of the visual. In my literature course, I will encourage students to read literature visually. In other words, I will encourage them to cast an eye critical of dominant perceptions and understanding. Also, as the spectator of television, film and theater is not only a viewer, who sees, but also an audience, who listens, I will also encourage my students of literature to see and listen. For example, when reading literature, one must ask questions such as: "What ideas and practices make certain things seeable and others un-seeable? Who is assuming the position of seeing, speaking, and acting? Who is seen, spoken of, and acted upon? Who is silent or silenced? How does one look, speak, move, and act? By asking these questions, we can investigate the ways in which literature, not only as the literal, but also as the visual text, constructs our selves and society.

Teaching literature poses yet more challenges when it involves unfamiliar cultures. Non-western cultures are often studied in order to “know” other cultures. In the age when knowledge is equated with information, literature also becomes an instrument to collect information. However, literature must be more than a means to retrieve information about a certain culture. We must study literature as a cultural, social, and political field, which creates and disturbs knowledge. Students often come to the first class of Japanese literature and culture with a preconceived knowledge of Japan as an isolated, unified, homogenized, and harmonized nation, and of Japanese as people who essentially determine the Japanese “national character” and cultural uniqueness. Instead of explaining with simplistic terms and themes, I will direct students to explore the complexity and hybridity of “Japan,” which constitutes differences of ethnicity, class, age, gender, sexual orientation, and physical (dis)abilities. Instead of accepting biological and geographical determinism, I encourage students to situate literature in the contexts of history, politics, and institutions, which create Japan and Japanese. Teaching/studying literature is a powerful way to conduct cultural analysis when we identify, expose, and question common perceptions and stereotypes. Studying Japanese literature in historical and political contexts can lead students to explore questions and issues further about Japan and its place in the world.

In my lectures, I will explain the object of inquiry, but my explanation is not meant to be the final mastery over it, but to be a departure point for students’ challenges and questions. I encourage students to question the unquestioned, the received hierarchies, the received judgments, and the dominant assumptions. By engaging in discussions, we will ask questions, contextualize them, investigate them, defend or critique a claim, and propose topics for further discussions. We will learn from one another, and teach each other, by active and thoughtful listening and speaking. My goal in teaching is that each and every student leaves my classroom with new questions, with skills to tackle those questions, and with an ability to think in complex ways about some of the most interesting, controversial, and important issues of today.