English 1A **Book Club Project**

Updated for Fall 2012

**Overview:** The book club project is designed to provide a number of benefits: to get you comfortable with reading longer writings than the essays in the text, to let you see how the personal voice and the ethnographic essay look in the “real world,” to give you insights into lives very different from your own, and/or to give you deeper insights into your own life by learning about those who are one step ahead of you on their life paths.

**Details:**

**The Books** The books you will choose among are all told in the first person, giving you the writer’s point of view directly, which relates to the personal voice you will use in your essays for this class. They also involve ethnography, meaning they are painting not just a self-portrait of the writer but also a portrait of a particular community or group within the larger society. Most of them have some connection to the idea of education, whether formal schooling or a more informal kind. Finally, most were chosen not only for the inherent interest of the story they tell but also because they are very well written, and thus are good models for your own writing.

**The Assignments** I might add some small ones as we go along, but here are the ones you will definitely do. Please check the syllabus for your section’s due dates and write them in!

1) Topic Proposal for Book Clubs: This will be a brief statement of who will be in your group (at least 3 people but no more than 5). If you want to pitch an alternative book that fits the criteria listed above under “The Books,” that pitch (1 paragraph + a copy of the book) will also be due that day. You will need to persuade at least 2 other people to join your group. **Due:**

2) Progress Report: This will be a short report (1 paragraph for each person in the group) to tell me how the reading is going so far. You can also report any problems or questions that have come up. **Due:**

3) Office Conferences The groups will meet with me (one group at a time) in my office

to discuss in-class presentations. Conference sign-ups will be the previous week.**Due:**

4) Presentations These will be fairly short, about 10 minutes each group. You will discuss major themes in your books, summarize the plot, and discuss how the personal voice and the ethnographic reportage were used to appeal to the book’s audience. You will also summarize the book’s critical reception and cultural impact. Finally, you will tell us what you thought about the book personally. **Week of 11/26 and 12/3**

5) Post-Read Analysis: This will allow you to reflect on how well your book club project experience matched the goals for the project. It will be used to adjust the project for future classes. **Due:**

**The Choices:** I am open to suggestions of other titles, but here are the ones I am recommending. The ones above the line have already been used successfully in previous classes. Most of these books are available for you to check out of the library and look at before you make your choice. I believe all are available in paperback versions for you to buy. It will be your responsibility to get your own copy of the book. A more detailed list of these is on the course Web site.

**Lost in the Meritocracy: The Undereducation of an Overachiever** by Walter Kirn

**The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfill a Dream**

By Drs. Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt

**The Film Club** by David Gilmour

**Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother** by Amy Chua

**Three Cups of Tea: One Man’s Mission to Promote Peace . . . One School at a Time**

By Greg Mortenson (Note: Don’t get the Young Reader’s edition.)

**Outcasts United: A Refugee Team, An American Town** by Warren St. John

**The Translator: A Tribesman’s Memoir of Darfur** By Daoud Hari

**Mexican Enough: My Life Between the Borderlines** by Stephanie Elizondo Griest

**Working in the Shadows: A Year of Doing the Jobs (Most) Americans Won’t Do** by Gabriel Thompson

What is it like doing the back-breaking work of immigrants? To find out, Gabriel Thompson spent the year working alongside Latino immigrants, who initially thought he was either crazy or an undercover immigration agent. He stooped over lettuce fields in Arizona and worked the graveyard shift at a chicken slaughterhouse in rural Alabama. He dodged taxis—not always successfully—as a bicycle delivery “boy” for an upscale Manhattan restaurant, and was fired from a flower shop by a boss who, he quickly realized, was nuts.

As one coworker explained, “These jobs make you old quick.” Back spasms occasionally keep Thompson in bed, where he suffers recurring nightmares involving iceberg lettuce and chicken carcasses. Combining personal narrative with investigative reporting, Thompson shines a bright light on the underside of the American economy, exposing harsh working conditions, union busting, and lax government enforcement—while telling the stories of workers, undocumented immigrants and desperate US citizens alike, forced to live with chronic pain in the pursuit of $8 an hour.

**Yes, Chef** by Marcus Samuelson

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**Leaving Microsoft to Change the World: An Entrepreneur's Odyssey to Educate the World's Children** by John Wood

**Kabul Beauty School: An American Woman Goes Behind the Veil**

by Deborah Rodriguez