UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
COURSE OUTLINE

COURSE TITLE: Teaching Caribbean Poetry
COURSE CODE: EDLA3111
DURATION: 39 hours
NO. OF CREDITS: 3
LENGTH OF COURSE: ONE SEMESTER
PRE-REQUISITES: Any Level 1 poetry course

RATIONALE

Teachers in the Caribbean and UK face some challenges in the teaching of poetry as indicated in the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) UK, and Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) reports on achievement in this area. The difficulties have been reflected in teachers teaching rigidly to the tenets of the relevant national curriculum, but often without flair, enthusiasm and confidence; concentrating on students passing exams rather than gaining a rich understanding of, and passion for, poetry; and even avoiding teaching poetry (or aspects of it they find too demanding). Cremin et al in UK (2008, 2009) noted the considerable insecurity of teachers’ subject knowledge in relation to poetry. One result of this relative lack of expertise is that school students tend to be negative, at worst, or cautious, at best, about poetry. Instead of personal responses to the meaning and musicality of the poem, students tend to focus on limited academic approaches such as ‘hunting the device’ i.e. looking out for figures of speech and thereby losing both the sense of the poem and the pleasures it offers. Conversely, some students treat the poetry experience, as a sort of ‘outpouring’ of pent-up emotions, without understanding of the patterns in language that might trigger such effects in fact the necessity for analysis, refined and extended by deeper and wider encounters with poetry. Teachers need greater exposure to a range of poetry that they can access with students.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course aims to promote a better understanding and appreciation of Caribbean poetry and the issues surrounding the learning and teaching of this area of the English curriculum in schools. It offers support to teachers by expanding their knowledge base and developing their confidence with poetry as they inspire and educate their students. It thus seeks to encourage and develop teachers’ personal, analytical and pedagogical responses to Caribbean poetry.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course the participants will be able to:

• Critically analyze major themes in Caribbean poetry through the study of key poets
• Critically appraise their responses to Caribbean poetry and discuss how these impact on their teaching
• Evaluate the place of Caribbean poetry on the GCSE/CSEC syllabus
• Develop lesson plans that provide opportunities for students to explore themes of Caribbean poetry, such as the environment and sustainable development, gender, migration, diaspora politics and communities.
• Examine issues surrounding Caribbean poetry, including choice of texts and poets
• Review the views on Caribbean poets represented on the UK’s Online Poetry Archive

CONTENT:
1. The Role and Scope of Caribbean Poetry
   - The history of the Caribbean and its influence in shaping the form and content of Caribbean poetry
   - An overview of the history of Caribbean poetry
   - Caribbean poetry and the Environment
   - Caribbean poetry in the English classroom (An Introduction)

2. The Music of Caribbean Poetry
   - Caribbean ‘forms’ of music and their connection with Caribbean poetry
   - Sustaining the interest levels of students in the English classroom through the use of poems that are presented through music
   - Approaches and techniques to utilize when encouraging students to engage with these ‘forms’

3. ‘Nation Language’ and Caribbean Poetry
   - Languages of the Caribbean and their impact on the form and content of Caribbean poetry
   - Introduction to the presentation and use of ‘nation language’ in particular poems
   - Creole Languages: how they are perceived and received in the English classroom

4. Roots, Africa, Slavery: Poetry of Resistance and Oppression
   - Recurrent themes of resistance and oppression in Caribbean poetry and how to promote meaningful student responses to these impulses
   - The use of context in the effort to promote student appreciation of poems that exist within this category

5. Odysseys/ ‘Islands in the Sun’
   - The poetry of Derek Walcott
   - Helping students to meaningfully engage with the use of language, the presentation of themes and the influential presence of history in Walcott’s poetry

6. Views of the Caribbean from “Inglan” – British Caribbean Poetry
   - Issues surrounding the teaching of British Caribbean poetry
   - Focused study of selected poets: John Agard, Fred D’Aguiar, James Berry, Valerie Bloom, Grace Nichols, Archie Markham, Benjamin Zephaniah
Understanding and interrogating the influence of ‘British systems’ on the CSEC syllabus/ Issues arising from teaching Caribbean poetry in the UK

7. Contemporary Caribbean Poetry
   - Focused study of selected poets: Edward Baugh, Kwame Dawes, Lorna Goodison, Kei Miller, Mervyn Morris, Velma Pollard, Jennifer Rahim, Dennis Scott, Olive Senior, Tanya Shirley
   - Contemporary Caribbean poetry and the teaching of poetry in the English classroom

8. Evaluation and Assessment
   - Evaluation and Assessment of the teaching of Caribbean poetry in the English classroom

METHODOLOGY:
3 contact hours per week in the form of lectures, seminars, group work supported by visiting poets and interaction through the Online Poetry Archive

EVALUATION:

60% PORTFOLIO: To include: 5 reflective pieces (20%), peer response journal (10%), and one unit plan devised and located within a GCSE/CSEC syllabus (30%).

40% FINAL EXAM (2 hours)

REFERENCES
Critical Reading (Critics on the poets)

Highly Recommended


Recommended


Poetry (to be selected from this list)


Breeze, Jean Binta (2006) *The Fifth Figure* Tarset: Bloodaxe.


