

**UGS 303 Difficult Dialogues / Substantial Writing Component:
Suicides in Japan, the Literal and the Literary (Unique # 64070)**

Fall 2011, for Tu/Th 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. (MEZ 1.212)

Instructor: Kirsten **Cather**, kcather@mail.utexas.edu, 471.0031
Cather Office Hours: Tu/Th 12:30 – 2 p.m. in WCH 5.104B
Teaching Assistant: Maeri Megumi, mmegumi@mail.utexas.edu
TA Office Hours: Fri 10:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m. in WMB 1.114

Course Description

Japan has been called "the suicide nation" by many commentators both inside and outside of Japan. It is equally well-known for its abundant representations of suicide in art, from high literature, poetry, and theater dating back to the premodern period to films, manga (comic books), and anime today. In this class, we will consider the role of suicide in the works and in the imaginations of Japanese artists and audiences, as well as in our own imaginations. We will consider: What effect does reading a glorified account of suicide have on us as readers? Does our opinion change if the suicide is not glorified? Or if it's a film or comic book instead of a story? Or when we find that the artist themselves later committed suicide? How do these representations influence the way we think about suicide?

Suicide is something that touches our society and many of our lives personally, but often we do not feel comfortable discussing it directly because of the charged emotions surrounding the topic. In this class, we will use the Japanese case study as a means of talking about both the actual phenomenon of suicide and the representations of suicide that we get in the media, arts, pop culture, and the responses to these by government officials and religious representatives. In sum, the course is designed to make us to think more analytically and critically about our own take on suicide by deepening and nuancing our knowledge of suicide in a nation that seems so distant from our own.

Required Readings & Other Materials To Purchase:

- The following books are available for purchase at the UT Co-Op (2246 Guadalupe, (512) 476-7211. You are welcome to buy them elsewhere, but be sure to buy the same version (ISBN#) as those listed below so that we can all refer to the same page numbers:
 - Takeda, Izumo et al. *Chūshingura: The Treasury of Loyal Retainers* (orig. 1748). Trans. Donald Keene. NY: Columbia University Press, 1971. ISBN # 0231035314
 - Murakami, Haruki. *Norwegian Wood* (orig. 1987). Trans. Jay Rubin. NY: Vintage Edition, 2000. ISBN # 978-0375704024.
- Course Packet of Required Readings:
Available at Jenn's Copy Shop NORTH branch (2518 Guadalupe Street, Austin - (512) 482-0779)
- Any additional assigned readings will be made available as PDFs or web links on Blackboard under Course Documents.
- All films listed with a call number on the schedule are available for re-viewing at the Fine Arts Library (DFA, 3rd floor).
- You'll need to purchase the following materials and **bring them with you to class consistently**:
 - Something to take notes in. Either a paper notebook or you are welcome to use a laptop if you find it helps with note-taking, but surfing the web, chatting on Facebook, etc., are not allowed in class. If you choose this option, you will need to email and/or print out hard copies to turn in in-class assignments when required.
 - A packet of 3"X5" index cards for pop quizzes.

Grading

- Regular in-class quizzes, individual and group exercises = 12% (lowest score automatically dropped)
 - Pop quizzes will often be held at the start of classes to ensure two things: 1) that you are attending class regularly and 2) that you've carefully completed the assigned readings and/or viewings. You'll need to use your 3"X5" index cards for these or it will not be graded. Quizzes are worth 5 possible points total. If you get the answer right, you receive 5/5, if it's wrong, you get 2.5/5 for attending class, and if you are absent or late and miss the quiz, you receive 0/5.
 - In-class individual and group exercises will also be assigned as needed to help you develop the skills necessary for improving your writing, reading, speaking, and analytical skills. These will be graded on a \checkmark +, \checkmark , \checkmark - basis.
- Homework assignments (4 total X 7% each) = 28%
 - A variety of homework assignments (due on the date indicated in the schedule below) designed to help develop strong analytical, paper-writing, and oral presentation skills.
- Paper #1 (4-5 pages), detailed outline (5%), peer/self evaluation worksheet and rewrite (10%)= 15% (details TBA)
- Paper #2 (4-5 pages) = 20% (details TBA)
- Oral Presentation/Write-Up = 10%
 - Each of you will sign up to be one of the two presenters for a presentation day listed on the syllabus schedule. On that day, each of you will be responsible for delivering a 5-min. oral presentation to the class. Before you present, you will need to turn into me a hard-copy of your 1-pg. write-up of your presentation/discussion questions (detailed instructions on Blackboard under Assignments). If you do not show or are unable to give your presentation on the assigned day, you will receive a "0" for this assignment. Absolutely no make-ups.
- Final Project (details TBA)= 10%
- Class Participation/Contribution = 5%: Note that this is based on both your participation (active engagement in all classes) and contribution (quality of your participation) rather than merely on attending classes, although 1/2 percentage point will be automatically deducted for each unexcused absence beyond one.

Grading Policy

Grades are assigned as follows: 93-100 = A; 90-92.9 = A-; 87-89.9 = B+; 83-86.9 = B; 80-82.9 = B-; 77-79.9 = C+; 73-76.9 = C; 70-72.9 = C-; 67-69.9 = D+; 63-66.9 = D; 60-62.9 = D-; below 60 = F. As a rule, I do not grade on a curve or round up grades. If you receive an 89.7, you will receive a B+. One exception to this rule is that a grade that is very close to the next grade level, such as an 89.9 or 79.9, may be rounded up to the higher grade if the student has consistently attended class and participated fully in class discussions. There are no extra credit assignments for this class.

Standards and Expectations:

Careful, thorough reading/viewing of the assigned texts by the date indicated on the schedule. Reading and viewing require your active engagement with the text. Detailed note-taking is essential and **you should always bring your copy of the readings and your notes to class** since you will need to refer to them frequently for group and class discussion/activities.

Attendance at all classes and considerate, attentive listening to lectures and discussions. Sleepers and disruptive students will be asked to leave.

Active and considerate participation in class and group discussions.

Timely completion of assignments and exams. **No make-up quizzes will be given and no late assignments accepted.** Extensions will be granted in only very rare cases for legitimate reasons (i.e. religious holidays), but even in these cases, arrangements must be made with the instructor one week prior. Last-minute family or medical emergencies will be considered, but are not guaranteed and

documented proof of emergency is required. If you do not show, you will receive a "0" for the assignment or test.

Announcements of schedule changes and/or homework assignments may be made in the previous class or by email and/or Blackboard announcements. An updated schedule of readings & assignments will always be posted on Blackboard. It is your responsibility to check it regularly.

Powerpoints and other lecture notes will **not** be posted on blackboard. If you miss class, you should arrange to get notes from a classmate. If you have questions, attend TA or instructor office hours.

Official Policies

Academic integrity: You are expected to adhere to university requirements on academic honesty and integrity. Behaviors, such as plagiarism, copying of another student's work, or cheating on an exam, are serious offenses that will result in the grade of an "F" for the course and will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Services, where further disciplinary action may be taken. Please refer to the following website for information on how to avoid plagiarism in your work and/or discuss this with the instructor: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

University Electronic Notification Mail Policy: In this course, e-mail will be used as a means of communication with students. You will be responsible for checking your e-mail regularly for class announcements and assignments. As per the University Electronic Notification Policy (please see <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.html>), it is your responsibility to update your email address and to check your e-mail regularly.

Accommodations for Students with Documented Disabilities: Students who require special accommodations may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities (471-6529 voice or 471-4641 TTY). This letter should be presented to the instructor at the beginning of the semester so that appropriate accommodations can be made at that time. For more information, please see: <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

Use of Blackboard in Class: Many of our readings are available on Blackboard. You should print these out and bring with you to class. Please allow yourself enough time before an assignment is due. As with all computer systems, there are occasional scheduled downtimes as well as unanticipated disruptions. Blackboard is available at <http://courses.utexas.edu>. Support is provided by the ITS Help Desk at 475-9400 during business hours on weekdays.

Religious Holidays: If you will need to miss class, tests, or other assignments due to the observance of a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the work you have missed provided you notify me **at least one week prior** to the absence.

Schedule (subject to change; check Blackboard for an updated schedule):

**Note: All Japanese artists are listed with last name first following the Japanese practice.
All numbered readings below are included in your course packet from Jenn's.**

Week One: Introductions

8/25: Introductions & Syllabus

In-class Assignment: Freewrite on Suicide & Japan.

Week Two: Suicide in Japan, in the Japanese Arts, and in the Classroom

8/30: 1) Berman, *Surviving Literary Suicide* excerpts (pp 1-16, 247-262)

Homework #1 due: Notetaking & Position Paper Exercise. *Read Berman carefully and mark up the text in the margins extensively with your own shorthand notes and "talk-back" to Berman. Assignment: What are Berman's main points? What evidence does he use to make his points? (Make a bullet point list of both of these.) Finally, what points of his did you agree with? Which did you disagree with? Next to each of his points, explain whether you agree or disagree, and briefly explain why. Now write up your response in a more coherent short 2-3 paragraph position paper in which you explain your opinion versus Berman's. Hand in assignment with a copy of your marked up copy of Berman.*

9/1: Guest Speaker: Marian Trattner, Suicide Prevention Coordinator, Counseling and Mental Health Center
2) Takahashi, "Cultural Dynamics and the Unconscious in Suicide in Japan" (1996)

Week Three: Military Suicides, Kamikaze Warriors and Their Wives

9/6: 3) The Tale of the Heike background information

4) *The Tale of the Heike* (1185) excerpts

5) "The Institutions of Suicide and Redress" in *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* pp 56-64

6) "Harakiri" in *Things Japanese* pp 219-222

"Yamamoto Tsunetomo: Hagakure (Hidden in Leaves)"(ca. 1710) excerpts (BB)

Oral Presentation #1 (Presenters = _____; _____)

HW #2 due: Gathering Evidence/Quotes Exercise (details TBA on BB).

9/8: 7) "Kamikaze Pilots: Last Letters" in *Silence to Light* pp 120-123

8) Ohnuki-Tierney *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms* excerpts (pp 186-187, 226-242)

Oral Presentation #2 (Presenters = _____; _____)

Required Extra Session: 9/9 (Fri) 3:30 p.m. (WCH 4.118): Talk by Professor Alan Tansman

To get credit, you must check-in with Maeri at the talk. If you cannot attend the Tansman talk because of an unavoidable schedule conflict, you must attend one of the two following events.

9/2 (Mon): Faculty v. Student Debate OR,

9/13 (Tue): UT Student Film Shorts Screenings & Roundtable (TIMES & PLACES TBA)

No matter what event you attend, to get full credit, you must submit a 2 page double-spaced position paper on the event by Thursday, Sept. 22nd.

Week Four: Military Suicides ct'd

9/13: *Chūshingura: The Treasury of Loyal Retainers* (Takeda Izumo et al., 1748)

9) Benedict, *Chrysanthemum and the Sword* excerpts (pp 22-26, 166-170, 198-199)

HW #3 due: Making an Outline Exercise (details TBA on BB).

- 9/15: 10) "Patriotism" (Mishima Yukio, 1966) (p. 93-118)
11) Mishima in Berman reading (excerpt pp 30-32)
Oral Presentation #3 (Presenters = _____; _____)
In-class screening of *Patriotism* (dir. Mishima Yukio, 1967)

HW due: Turn in by email 2-3 provocative and rich discussion questions for next Tuesday's session with Dr. Sonnenberg.

Week Five: Medicine, Culture, and Suicide

- 9/20: Guest Speaker: Dr. Steve Sonnenberg
12) Takahashi, "Culture and Suicide: From a Japanese Psychiatrists' Perspective," p. 137-139, 142-145
- 9/22: Discuss Sonnenberg, Tansman, Faculty v. Student Debate, UT Student Film Shorts
Oral Presentation #4 (Presenters = _____; _____)

HW #4 due: Position Paper on Required Extra Session (Tansman, Fac./Stud. Debate, Films) (details TBA on BB).

Week Six: Religion, Law, and Suicide

- 9/27: 13) Cosculluela, "Popular and Religious Arguments Against Suicide," p. 3-29; preface
Oral Presentation #5 (Presenters = _____; _____)
- 9/29: Readings on Law & Suicide (TBD)
Oral Presentation #6 (Presenters = _____; _____)

Week Seven: Military Suicides ct'd

- 10/4: Wrap-up discussion of Medicine/Religion/Culture using Military Suicides Unit
In-class screening of *Hara-kiri* (dir. Kobayashi Masaki, 1962, 133 min.)

Detailed Outline for Paper #1 on Military Suicides Unit Due (details TBA; see template under Assignments on BB)

- 10/6: Finish in-class screening of *Hara-kiri* and discuss

Week Eight: Love Suicides, East and West

- 10/11: **Paper #1 on Military Suicides Unit Due (details TBA)**
In-Class Peer and Self-Evaluation of Papers Workshop
- 10/13: 14) Oba, "Double Suicide, A Japanese Phenomenon" (1975), p. 344-50
15) DeVos, *Socialization for Achievement* excerpts pp 462-465, 473-474
Oral Presentation #7 (Presenters = _____; _____)

Week Nine : Love Suicides, ct'd.

- 10/18: 16) *Romeo and Juliet* excerpt (William Shakespeare, ca. 1595)
(synopsis available at http://www.shakespeare-literature.com/Romeo_and_Juliet/0.html)
17) "The Love Suicides at Amijima" excerpt (Chikamatsu Monzaemon, 1721), p. 170-208
In-class clips of *Double Suicide (Shinjū Ten no Amijima)*, dir. Shinoda Masahiro, 1969, DVD 988/4334)

Oral Presentation #8 (Presenters = _____; _____)

10/20: 18) "Love Suicide at Kamaara" (Yoshida Sueko, 1984), p. 214-33

Oral Presentation #9 (Presenters = _____; _____)

Week Ten: Love Suicides, ctd.

10/25: 19) "Love Suicide" (Kawabata Yasunari, 1926), p. 53-54.

Love Suicides (dir. Edmund Yeo, short film, 13 min.), at <http://www.fluxusonline.com/2010/film.php?cod=14>

10/27: 20) "Landscape with Flatiron" (Murakami Haruki, 1999)

Oral Presentation #10 (Presenters = _____; _____)

Week Eleven: Youth Suicide in Contemporary Japanese Pop Culture

11/1: 21) Samuels, "Let's Die Together: Why is Anonymous Group Suicide So Popular in Japan," p. 1-9

22) *Japan Today*, "Suicide Rate Soars in Japan," p. 1-8

23) Ozawa-de Silva, "Seeking to Escape the Suffering of Existence: Internet Suicide in Japan" (pp 246-258)

Oral Presentation #11 (Presenters = _____; _____)

11/3: *Suicide Circle* manga (Furuya Usumaru, 2001)

In-class clips of *Suicide Circle* film (dir. Sono Sion, 2002) – DVD not available at FA Library

Week Twelve: Youth Suicide, ctd.

11/8: *Norwegian Wood* (Murakami Haruki, 1987)

11/10: Continue discussion of *Norwegian Wood*

Oral Presentation #12 (Presenters = _____; _____)

Detailed Outline for Paper #2 On Love Suicides and/or Youth Suicides Unit Due (details TBA)

Week Thirteen: Suicidal "Art" and Ethics

11/15: Excerpts from *The Complete Suicide Manual* (Tsurumi Wataru, 1993), *The Costs of Suicide* (Amamiya Karin, 2002), and manga artist Yamada Hanako (BB)

In-class view clips of *The Bridge* (dir. Eric Steel, 2006, DVD 6153)

Oral Presentation #13 (Presenters = _____; _____)

11/17: Class Trip to the Blanton Museum

In-class Assignment (details TBA). Due at end of visit to Blanton.

Week Fourteen

11/22: In-class screening of *Harold and Maude* (dir. Hal Ashby, 1971, DVD 1087)

Paper #2 On Love Suicides and/or Youth Suicides Unit Due

11/24: OFF FOR THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

Week Fifteen

11/29: Final Project due in-class (details TBA); Presentations Begin

12/1: Final Project Presentations Continued & Wrap-up