

# Course Journal

Plan	Description & Reflection
<p><b>January 16, 2001</b></p> <p>- not much of a plan - brief intros plus questionnaire</p>	<p>First day - very brief, very SCATTERED overview of the course, introduced basic stuff on the research project, then passed out the questionnaire. I also asked them to draw a map of Youngstown on the back. Several folks protested that they couldn't do this, and I tried to point out that I wasn't expecting accurate maps, nor was this about accuracy at all, but rather about getting a sense of how they see Youngstown as a place. I think a discussion about the maps and the objects from Thursday's class will work well next week to introduce the whole idea of studying representations. (<a href="#">Back</a>)</p>
<p><b>January 18, 2001</b></p> <p>Questions on the syllabus - highlight Palmer quote</p> <p>Announcement - anyone who wants to do contract honors, see me after class</p> <p>For Tuesday - think about what went through your head when you were drawing your map on Tuesday - we'll start on Tuesday by discussing the maps</p> <p>Work w/ objects</p>	<p>Most students brought in artifacts, ranging from the two-foot long jackhammer bit Jeff brought in to Angie's high school diploma, Devin's track championship ring, or a fountain pen that Tom especially likes. Erin T brought in 2 pairs of work boots, one representing her time in a steelmill and another for her experience at Star Supply, bad work and good work. Our brief full-class discussion highlighted some different concepts of work, ranging from the effort put in to achieve goals to taking care of a disabled family member to the goals people want to achieve to the mundane and often difficult experiences in ordinary jobs. I tried to highlight a couple of key points, about how work is often tied to relationships, how people see work differently at different points in their lives, how we</p>

have ideas about what makes good, bad, real, or not-real work. I also tried to point out how, for many of them the things we'll be studying may seem sort of distant, because they don't have much personal connection with industrial work - only 4 said they had worked in a factory of any kind.

I also told them that on Tuesday we'll talk about how representations and artifacts carry meaning, and to think about the experience of creating the map of Youngstown and the experience of looking at the thing they brought in today, to consider how things come to have meaning.

Overall, the atmosphere felt good, especially once we started small group and then full class conversations. People seem engaged if still a bit unsure about what we're doing, which is ok. It's odd to be teaching so many student who I already know, because I find myself acknowledging too often that some people have already heard something - that's probably not necessary. ([Back](#))

## January 23, 2001

Map, artifact, poem, story - write across the board - How do these things have meaning? What is it about these things, or about our interaction with these things, that gives them meaning?

**Map** - Why do you think I asked you to draw a map? How did you decide what to put on the map? What might a map show about Youngstown? About you?

**Artifact** - What aspects of your object or your interaction with that object give it meaning? Poem - what does it mean? how do you know that?

**Story** - Fold a piece of paper in half:

I think this went fairly well. Starting with the map helped to set up ideas like author's intent, how we use texts, the use of signs, the role of memory (of both the creator and the user of a text), and the function of conventions. Artifacts differ because meaning is assigned to something that may be very different from what was intended, and this helped open a discussion about connotation and denotation as well as the possibility of a single text having multiple meanings. The poem got us more into language and how language works as a sign, though I'm not sure they really have that concept just yet. It's a bit more abstract. We finished with

on the left, write down something about this story that made it difficult for you ( be specific - a passage, certain words, etc.) Then on the right, try to put into words WHY that aspect of the text is difficult, why does this story fail to convey its meaning?

small group discussions of "Iron Mills," though it was clear that a good number of people hadn't read the whole story. Still, they had fairly good conversations from what I overheard, unpacking at least part of that story. So on Thursday, we'll need to start with discussing the story, and then move on to other readings. I also have to give them instructions for the first paper, which is due - ack! - next week. ([Back](#))

### January 25, 2001

1. Difficulties - after your discussions, what are you still uncertain or confused about regarding this story? Note how conversation can help clarify things - cf. Palmer quote
2. What does this story mean?
3. How does it convey its meaning?
  - Intent - what did the author intend?
  - Use - why you're reading it, talking about it
  - Memory - knowledge, associations
  - Signs - images & language
  - Structure - plot
4. What difficulties remain?
5. Look at Gogolak & LeSeuer - does an essay present any differences in terms of the making of meaning?
6. Assignment sheet for Tuesday's paper
7. Museum assignment

Students commented briefly on their difficulties - largely a matter of either lack of knowledge or simply not trusting themselves to understand something that seems hard. Good discussion of the story, using the 5 issues (on left). I tried to emphasize the idea that the author draws on her memory and creates memory for the reader. I have a sense that students have a pretty good grasp on the story and found its basic issues compelling, even though it was depressing and unfamiliar.

We didn't get to the other readings. Did pass out and review the assignment sheet for the paper due on Tuesday. ([Back](#))

**January 30, 2001**

Collect papers

Small groups - Gogolak & LeSeuer -  
Wwhat do they mean? How do they  
mean?

What difference, if any, does genre  
make in reading literature?

Interdisciplinarity: basic definition  
masks a very complex process (Note  
overlap but also difference between  
multimedia & interdisciplinarity)

Incremental moves over the term:

- start with literature
- expand range of texts
- link history with texts
- link history, texts, and theory

Good discussion of the 2 essays, mostly focused  
on how they used imagery and language to  
persuade their readers. The point about comparing  
essays to fiction went nowhere, though - not really  
important.

The brief discussion of interdisciplinarity felt stilted  
to me - like they didn't really know enough yet to  
even digest what I was saying. I went over the  
outline of how the papers will build toward  
interdisciplinarity, and I think that helped.

Ended with a "muddiest point" exercise to find out  
more about their confusion about interdisciplinarity  
- the largest number are simply confused in  
general, too confused to know exactly where to  
start. Others raise useful concerns - how much  
disciplinary knowledge will they need, how to draw  
boundaries, what's expected in the assignments. 4  
say they're not confused at all, though a couple of  
those admit that they're not entirely comfortable  
with that statement. ([Back](#))

**February 6, 2001**

Students worked in the lab, analyzing  
visual images using the 5-part rubric  
(intent, use, memory, signs, structure)  
& linking visual images with written  
texts.

Most students seem to adopt one of two strategies  
for this that allowed them to work in familiar ways.  
Either they chose the Gropper painting and  
interpreted it as a narrative, with some attention to  
details of the image but large focused on telling the  
story, or they chose the panoramic view of  
Youngstown and focused on identifying familiar  
features of the landscape.

This suggests a need for more attention to ways of reading visual images and how visual images might differ from written texts. I'm feeling frustrated and concerned about finding the time to do all of these things, though. I want to expand their vocabulary of interpretive strategies but also keep moving ahead on the basic content of the course. How to do both?

Later: after reading over their written notes on the images, I feel more confident about their comfort - they were able to apply the ideas of signs and structures effectively, noting things like the arrangement of the image or how things were depicted. [\(Back\)](#)

## February 8, 2001

With Nan's help, gave a presentation on interdisciplinarity, focusing on how we are moving from the study of texts, which is basically a variation on literary studies practices (extended to include other kinds of texts), to linking texts with history & geography. Also emphasized the importance of coming to this with questions and recognizing that it's a messy, never-completed, recursive, and dialogic process. Ended with discussion of what makes good questions for focusing one's analysis.

While students seem engaged with the presentation, their questions were more focused on content than on process. On the other hand, they developed very good questions about work for their own analyses, and they demonstrated solid critical understanding of what makes a good question, coming up with very clear, appropriate ideas about this. [\(Back\)](#)

**February 13, 2001**

Poems: 5 groups - how do these poems link work & place?

What do you think about that - in what ways are work and place connected? How does work shape the identity of places? How does geography shape work?

Collect & redistribute graphics

Based on what you see in this graphic, how are the 4 texts connected:

- themes (what they mean)
- form (how they make meaning)
- connections, differences, and patterns

What questions, if any, do you have about this graphic?

Collect again on front table, owners claim as they leave

OK discussion of the poems - largely because of the poems, not the students. They identified some key themes, and we did a bunch of rambling about Youngstown. That's ok, since this was largely about setting the stage for moving to more of a focus on place.

The graphics thing seemed OK - hard to tell without seeing their comments.

Lots of folks afterwards had good questions about the text webs. I'm encouraged that so many are asking for help or even reassurance. As I keep telling them feeling uncertain is OK, and it's important for me to keep telling them that it's all right to take a risk. ([Back](#))

**February 15, 2001**

Map exercise

Pairs seemed to work well, most starting by identifying familiar landmarks and working out from there. Most of their notes center on factual data, with little attention to the map as a representation and very little awareness that it might not be absolutely accurate. They made good use of the key, and most remained focused and interested for the full hour.

What was missing was a sense of reading the map as anything but a factual document, so we need to work with that as we go along. ([Back](#))

**February 20, 2001**

Small groups: What questions do you have about Youngstown's history and/or geography?

What do you think have been the most important changes in Youngstown over the past 150 years? Why did they occur? Why were they important?

About the map: How accurate was it? How do you know?

Analyzing images as texts: apply the rubric and think of the image not as a "transparent" picture but as a constructed, carefully designed re-presentation of something

Started off asking students to write down what they wanted to know more about and what they thought was important, with the intention of having a discussion about what happened here and why. But John sort of hijacked things, wanting to talk about the larger issues of the book. I should know better than to invite him in unless I'm willing to let him go off in whatever direction he chooses. So my class session goal of reflecting on how Youngstown's history was shaped didn't get met, though we did have good discussion about some specific incidents and issues, and about what Youngstown represents. [\(Back\)](#)

**February 22, 2001**

2 steps to work on over the next 2 class sessions:

1. Creating a list of key events, trends, and issues in national- and local-level history
2. Identifying links between history & texts - Bell, the map, Gropper, etc.

Step one: history

On Tuesday, did your groups have time to identify what you thought were the most important historical developments in Youngstown?

Today - major historical events/trends/issues on the national scale:

**Events:**

Good session - went around and had each person add something under one of the 3 categories - they came up with good things and were able to explain their importance, I bounced off of them to add more - worked well for an overview of the history - next we go on to linking national and local and linking history with texts. [\(Back\)](#)

- Strikes
- Opening of Ford plant
- Organization of Knights of Labor & AFL

**Trends:**

- Economic instability
- Industrial growth - mass production
- Urbanization
- Immigration
- Growing interest in leisure culture

**Issues:**

- How to manage relationships between workers & managers
- How to "Americanize" workers
- How to organize workers - by industry? By skill? By class?

How do local developments fit into these areas?

**February 27, 2001**

Linking history & texts

Did a grid focused on comparing what historians do with what textual studies scholars do - mostly lecture, emphasizing differences and similarities

Also introduced concept of cultural hegemony and negotiation - need to talk more about this one.

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**March 1, 2001**

2 versions of the history & text grid, one with 3 texts across the top, the other with 3 questions across the top

Asked students to work in groups to complete the grids and to discuss which worked better - most agreed that they liked the one focused on individual texts, but that the questions on the other version helped, too.

Tried to clarify again how history and texts link, but I'm having difficulty articulating this without making it sound idiotic - need to work more on this, I think.

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**March 6, 2001****Key concepts:**

- Work shapes the identities of individuals, groups, and communities by structuring their lives and their relationships with others and defining an image of what they're like
- As work and related activities change, identities change

**Individual identity:**

Sandburg - from "Smoke & Steel" - how does the work shape the workers' identity?

At work, do people gain or lose identity, or some of both? How?

- pride vs. alienation
- associations
- images available to others

Different kinds of work yield different kinds of identities

How does work-based identity formation change when people stop having lifelong jobs or careers?

**Group identity:**

Unions as groups built around shared

Didn't get through all of this, but I liked how it felt to weave together the poetry and the history. I didn't get the chance to explain to the students that what we were doing today was a sort of "seamless" version of interdisciplinarity.

I think the key ideas got through, though Thursday's diagnostic midterm will give me a better sense.

I am troubled that our numbers have dropped, though (on the other hand) it's taken longer than usual for that to happen. I fear that the text assignment series hasn't worked as well as I'd hoped. What I don't yet know is if the problem is the strategy or the execution. Did I need to start them with history? Start with 1 text and history? Start simply by giving them more forceful instructions for choosing their additional texts? It's hard to know, and I have to keep reminding myself that this is a long, slow learning process for me.

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identity McGovern - "The Workingman's Song" and this excerpt:

There were no men invited such as Slavs and 'Tally Annes,'

Hungarians and Chinamen with pigtail cues and fans.

no, every man who got the 'pass' a union man should be;

No blacksheep were admitted to the Puddlers' Jubilee.

"Labor Fears" article

How does union-based identity change over the course of the 20th C? Why?

- craft unions - identity tied to the kind of work you do, skill level, being native-born
- industry unions - organized via ethnic groups - languages, ethnic meeting halls, organizers from various groups - using ethnic identity to begin to construct class identity - decreasing importance of ethnicity/ but still an emphasis on race & gender
- union men vs. non-unionized workers - "labor aristocracy" - image of union workers as lazy, trying to get away with doing as little as possible

### **Community identity:**

Youngstown as steel town - 1945 film

To whose benefit is it to define Youngstown as a steel town?

What is the intent of the filmmaker?  
Who's negotiating with whom over what?

Why emphasize community during wartime?

CBS News - Youngstown as a site of failure

How does defining Youngstown in this way affect this place? Other places?

**March 8, 2001**

Questions about "Steel Town":

- What is the author's intent?
- What does the film say about Youngstown?
- Why use individuals' names?
- Why use the family Xmas scene, the school, and the symphony?

Leave at least 40 minutes for the midterm

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**March 20, 2001**

Report on midterm, discussion of culture as conversation, a little on interdisciplinarity

This was one of those teaching days that I wish I'd taped, because unplanned things happened in ways that made the session work very well. After giving some report back on their midterms, emphasizing how well they were doing, I devoted most of the time to an interactive lecture on culture as a conversation, built around the idea of hegemony. Drawing on John's perpetual adage about starting where the students are, I used education as the example, which worked very well. We talked about why teachers have power, how we use it, how students might negotiate with teachers. We also positioned the classroom in larger cultural structures - the university and the larger economic

	<p>and social order. I think it worked very well. Certainly, it felt good, and students were very engaged. What I don't yet know is whether they will be able to apply this knowledge. I need to follow up soon with a discussion that asks about cultural negotiation and power. <a href="#">(Back)</a></p>
<p><b>March 22, 2001</b></p> <p>Discussion of <i>Out of This Furnace</i></p>	<p>Small group today - I think a bunch of people just didn't want to discuss the novel. So we moved into a circle and had a good, largely unstructured, but thoughtful discussion about the novel and the world it represents, in many cases linking the historical setting of the novel to our setting today. Again, things felt good, and I think this was a useful conversation, if only because it reinforced the idea that the literary text interacts with its history. <a href="#">(Back)</a></p>
<p><b>March 27, 2001</b></p> <p>2 issues to explore with the oral histories: method &amp; content</p> <p><b>Method:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What is the goal of an oral history interview?</li> <li>● What is the interviewer's role?</li> <li>● How do you analyze the answers - fact vs. fiction, objectivity vs. subjectivity?</li> <li>● What questions do you have about doing this kind of research?</li> </ul> <p><b>Content:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What kinds of conflicts did people talk about?</li> <li>● How did they view conflict?</li> <li>● Why do you think they saw things that way?</li> <li>● How does the speaker's perspective/positionality come into play?</li> <li>● Where do the people whose stories you heard fit into the power structure of their time?</li> </ul>	<p>Pretty good day. The discussion was a bit desultory, but since my primary goal was to reassure students that they knew enough to do these interviews and to raise some critical questions about what kinds of data interviews do and do not provide, I think it worked OK.</p> <p>I'm feeling very good about the atmosphere in the class - people seem relaxed, they ask a lot of good questions both in full class sessions and individually, they seem engaged. Most of the students today seem to have done the assignment, though there was no set accountability (not something I tend to worry much about).</p> <p>On the other hand, attendance has fallen off this week, and people are straggling in a lot. I'm not sure why that is. Some of it, I suspect, has nothing to do with the course. It's about 2/3 of the way through the term, and people are getting tired, sick, etc. Several students have had personal difficulties, including one who just learned that his father has cancer. These are not easy things, and they impact students' lives in ways that the course doesn't. <a href="#">(Back)</a></p>

How does their version of the story reflect the process of cultural negotiation & hegemony?

**March 29, 2001**

Readings that focus on conflict - need to analyze the poems but also raise questions about two things:

- how do the texts reflect the process of negotiation and issues of conflict (especially the complexity of affiliations and divisions)
- how do the conflicts represented in the readings relate to the conflicts we read about in the oral histories?

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**April 3, 2001**

Local texts - poems by Youngstown writers

Interesting responses to the poems - students noted a number of key points and images, but they also expressed a lot of frustration about the negativity

This led into a very lively discussion about Youngstown's problems and their perspectives as people who were (mostly) born after 1977. Eventually, the discussion turned to what we could do to change Youngstown.

What I love most about this is the idea that they could move from poems to politics, and that they have some sense of ownership and agency. [\(Back\)](#)

**April 5, 2001**

Film showing: *Struggles in Steel*

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<p><b>April 10, 2001</b></p> <p>Discussion of film &amp; of family histories</p>	<p>Not a lot of response to the film, but then I wasn't looking for much - several commented about the significance of the story and how effectively it was presented.</p> <p>Mostly we talked about what they had learned from the family histories, talking about their interactions, how they were able to (and in some cases were not able to) link their individual family histories with the broader history. Good discussion. <a href="#">(Back)</a></p>
<p><b>April 12, 2001</b></p> <p>Small groups comparing notes on the family history papers &amp; developing a list of grading criteria</p>	<p>Their evaluations of each other's papers generated a good, clear list of grading criteria. What I like most is that they all emphasized the importance of making clear links with the broader picture.</p> <p>Also talked more about the patterns they noticed and what this project added to their understanding of the place. I think a split is developing, which I've seen before in this course, between students who really get into the local connections and students who start to feel left out because they don't feel those connections. <a href="#">(Back)</a></p>
<p><b>April 17, 2001</b></p> <p>Devoted the entire class to 2 honors presentations, one on the KKK and one on Traficant</p>	<p>OK presentations - neither Deena nor Matt really presented as well as they could have, though both generated some good questions and discussion, especially Matt's. <a href="#">(Back)</a></p>
<p><b>April 19, 2001</b></p> <p>Sarah's honors presentation - more on the KKK</p> <p>Showed Bryn's film and then discussed its representation of Youngstown and the kinds of stories they want to present</p>	<p>The discussion following the film was a bit slow - I'm betting that they felt intimidated by having the filmmaker there, as well as other visitors. But we got into a good discussion about how to think about the relationship between past, present, and future in Youngstown, with some students arguing that we have to understand the past in order to construct a better future and others explaining that they don't feel a great sense of connection with that past. <a href="#">(Back)</a></p>
<p><b>April 24, 2001</b></p> <p>Meet with both groups on final projects, have them work in pairs otherwise, talking about ideas and strategies for planning.</p>	<p>These overviews went OK, but I think we're going to run into a common problem with this kind of assignment: students get caught up in the technology and the format and forget about the substance. I think they are both excited and intimidated about the technology. <a href="#">(Back)</a></p>

<p><b>April 26, 2001</b></p> <p>Computer lab - work individually with people on their projects</p> <p>Classroom - small group activity, videotaping for portfolio</p>	<p>People seem to be coming up with good ideas for the exhibits, but the proposals are a bit wilder. In a way, this is in itself a good learning experience, because they're finding out that solutions to the city's problems aren't easy, that the people involved in trying to create change really are trying, that there are material and political obstacles to making change. It's frustrating, but it's useful. (<a href="#">Back</a>)</p>
<p><b>May 1, 2001</b></p> <p>Drafts due - small groups review &amp; discuss strategies for improvement - need to create handout to guide these discussions</p>	<p>Very loud day. While their discussions of each other's projects were pretty quick, what I overheard sounded fairly helpful and constructive. (<a href="#">Back</a>)</p>
<p><b>May 3, 2001</b></p> <p>Last day. Had them write a final assessment. First, what was the most significant thing you learned this term? Then, using Jeff's "At first/and then/and now" strategy, write the story of how you learned it - what did you think initially? when did it change and why? where do you stand with it now?</p> <p>Then just left people time to work individually.</p>	<p>Interesting to note the range of times for people working on this, from 10 minutes to almost an hour. I'm putting off reading them until after I file grades, though. (<a href="#">Back</a>)</p>