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Marta Moore Editor

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BOOK-IN-COMMON TEACHING GUIDE

2017-2018

Collin College Book-in-Common Committee



2017-2018 BOOK-IN-COMMON

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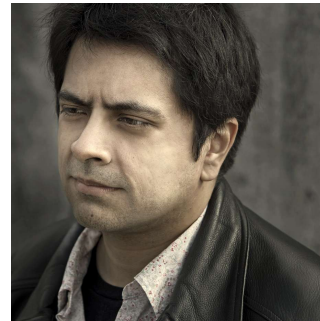
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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT *TAKE THIS MAN: A MEMOIR*

PUBLISHER'S SUMMARY

When he was three years old, Brando Kelly Ulloa was abandoned by his immigrant father. His mother, Maria, dreaming of a more exciting life, saw no reason for her son to live as a Mexican American just because he was born one. With the help of Maria's ruthless imagination and a hastily penned jailhouse correspondence, the life of "Brando Skyhorse," the Native American son of an incarcerated political activist, was about to begin.



Through a series of letters to Paul Skyhorse Johnson, a stranger in prison for armed robbery, Maria reinvents herself and her young son as American Indians in the colorful Mexican-American neighborhood of Echo Park, California, where Brando and his mother live with his acerbic grandmother and a rotating cast of surrogate fathers. It will be thirty years before Brando begins to untangle the truth, when a surprise discovery leads him to his biological father at last.

From this PEN/Hemingway Award-winning novelist comes an extraordinary literary memoir capturing a mother-son story unlike any other and a boy's single-minded search for a father, wherever he can find one.

DANA JENSEN – MEMOIR AS LITERARY GENRE

Dictionary.com, to use as banal a source as possible, defines memoir this way:

- 1) a record of events written by a person having intimate knowledge of them and based on personal observation. Usually, memoirs.
- 2) an account of one's personal life and experiences; autobiography.
- 3) the published record of the proceedings of a group or organization, as of a learned society.
- 4) a biography or biographical sketch

Yet, none of these entries – despite the multiple stabs – seem to hit memoir in the heart. Certainly yes, the genre is a record of events written by a privileged observer who no doubt is intimate with his or her own life, and insofar as the text conveys that life's events, it is biographical. Still, the core of the genre seems untouched by this explanation because this account, I suggest, does not mention the invention of truth that memoir so often engages. Editor William Zinsser in the introduction to *Inventing the Truth* claims that any good memoir contains two elements:

- a) integrity of intention (what Zinsser says is an Art) – “the memoir is the best search mechanism that writers are given. Memoir is how we try to make sense of who we are, who we were, and what values and heritage shaped us. If a writer seriously embarks on that quest, then the reader will be nourished by the journey, bringing along many journeys with quests of their own” (6).
- b) Carpentry (what Zinsser says is a Craft) – “Good memoirs are a care OF construction...and good writers must manufacture a text, imposing narrative order on a jumble of half-remembered events. With that feat of manipulation, they arrive at a truth that is theirs alone, not quite like that of anybody else that was present at the same events: (6).

In this way, memoir does not simply recount eyewitness observations of events that seem interesting enough to be replayed by the tongue or pen. Events, occasions, and incidents of the past seem rather the departure point for the real work of memoir that bends its back to recall and flexes its memory to determine and comprehend what was their significance. Works such as *Take this Man* when doing the “true work” of memoir, endeavor to make discernable

connections between past experience and present perspectives such that one's overall wisdom is increased. Making these connections, some will say, is inventing the truth. For this reason, memoir is a controversial genre that some view as a liar's game, altering the "facts" of the past or omitting undeniable elements so as to present the whole of it falsely. But one should consider whether the exclusively factual recounting of any event is worth recounting at all. Alone, facts are boring, for alone, facts have no meaning. Arguably, it is this imposed narrative order that Zinsser observes – these fictive connections which are not necessarily fictitious – that make any story desirable for the hearing. These very inventions then seem to be the heart as well as the worth of memoir as literary genre.

STUDY GUIDES, ACTIVITIES, ESSAYS, AND RESOURCES

JOAN KENNEDY – STUDY GUIDE

GENERAL DISCUSSION TOPICS:

1. Brando Skyhorse's memoir offers a vision of a survivor story. What obstacles did the author face while maturing into adulthood? How did he overcome his harsh family circumstances?
2. Examine the dysfunctional family environment that Brando experienced. Provide examples of this. What was the result for Brando?
3. What was the process by which Brando's mother Maria chose his Skyhorse name? What name did she give to herself? Why did she choose to assume a false name?
4. Why do you think Brando's mother Maria denied her Mexican heritage? What did she hope to gain?
5. Brando states: "The word *father* was something I attached to a relationship, not to any one particular person, and I decided I'd keep using that word on someone until it stuck. Finding out about my real dad that was nowhere in my life didn't mean nearly as much as a fake dad that could be present every day (Ch. 6). Examine Brando's search for a father figure throughout his childhood and into adulthood. Who were the five "fathers" who entered in and out of his family environment. Who was his biological father?
6. How does Brando's story demonstrate his search for identity?
7. What positive qualities does Brando demonstrate amid the chaos of his upbringing?
8. Define the psychological term "co-dependency." Discuss examples from the memoir demonstrating the motivation, actions, and results that this type of human relationship embodies.
9. Misogyny is a term referring to people who hate women. Misandry is a term for people who hate men. Discuss the misandrist attitudes that Brando's grandmother June and mother Maria displayed.
10. Discuss the bigotry and racism embodied in the memoir. Give specific examples.
11. Define the term "white man's guilt." What role does this play in the choices and actions of some members of Brando's family?
12. Brando's birth name was Brando Ulloa. He officially changed his name to Brando Skyhorse later in his life. Why do you think he did this?

13. What is Brando's current relationship with his biological father Candido Ulloa and his Ulloa siblings?
14. Why do you think that Brando chose the title *Take This Man* for his memoir?
15. Define memoir as a literary genre. What is the ethos consideration for this type of writing?

KAY MIZELL – STUDY QUESTIONS

I. ESSAY PROMPTS

Write an essay in response to the following prompts.

1. In a recent *National Geographic* article entitled, “Why We Lie,” Yudhijit Bhattacharjee argues, “Honesty may be the best policy, but deception and dishonesty are part of being human,” admitting that all lies are not the same because “people lie and tell the truth to achieve a goal” (June 2017, 31, 39). One of the major threads running through *Take This Man* is his mother’s propensity to deceive, lie, and falsify. Explain the pervasiveness of this behavior, point to several examples of Maria’s lies and account for her veering from the truth.
2. Robert Cole, a psychiatrist, Harvard medical school professor, and author, in his *The Call of Stories*, quotes another physician-poet, Dr. William Carlos Williams, “Their story, yours, mine—it’s what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them” (30). Brando Skyhorse clearly has a respect for the narrative as he tells about his abandonment by his birth father, his search for his identity, his learning to be a man, and his shifting concepts of family. Reflecting on his mother’s “mythmaking,” he concludes that “every storyteller needs more than good stories. He needs to understand why he’s telling the stories he tells. Narrative is breath” (239). Discuss the cumulative story Skyhorse tells mentioning key figures, events, or lessons he shares with the reader and why he tells the stories he tells.
3. A central question for each individual is “Who am I?” one made more complex by shifting families, real or perceived multi-ethnicities, and various traumatic experiences. Write about Brando Skyhorse’s problem with his identity citing important lines that address this central issue.
4. In the opening of the book, the author speaks of the father son relationship as a path. “First I was forced to accept them, then slowly I trusted them, then I grew to love them. Then they left” (2). Explain this pattern for one or two of Skyhorse’s “fathers” mentioning what he learned from them and what he took on as part of himself.
5. In a succinct analysis of his own experiences with family, Skyhorse concludes, “I’m learning that surviving a family is different from living

with one" (253). Contrast his survival of his triune family with the life his new family is living, perhaps mentioning what it means to be a family.

II. QUESTIONS SKYHORSE ASKS IN THE BOOK

In this memoir, the author asks significant questions throughout the book that poignantly address the deep probing he does from his boyhood to his manhood. Each question may serve as a prompt for an essay addressing that theme in the book and/or in the student's own life.

1. In reference to his make-believe Caucasian sister, Janine Deborah Patterson's being kidnapped, he asks, "What else didn't they believe?" referring to the lies his mother told (20).
2. When Helen, "his long-lost abducted sister, Janaine" who was ten-years older than Janaine would have been, started giving him chores and instructions, he asked, "Why is she telling me what to do? Am I going to collect mothers now the way I'd been collecting fathers? (55).
3. In describing one of his mother's "special advertisements" for her business, the author pictures a provocative woman wearing a T-shirt that says, "I am the woman your mother warned you about" to which he responds, "But what if this woman *was* your mother?" (89).
4. When both Oscar and Paul let Brando know that the damage was inside his house, he asked, "Were Oscar and Paul right? What *would* these women do to me? (128).
5. In questioning Paul's abandoning him, he asks a series of questions. "Hadn't my other fathers—Candido, Frank, Robert—been building up to this one father whose name I shared? Who was supposed to stay for good?" He probes deeper, "If I wasn't a Skyhorse—the only part of my identity I felt was 'me'—then who *was* I? A Mexican who had no idea what being Mexican meant? Pretending to be an American Indian in name only? An abandoned son mourning his dead father who wasn't dead and wasn't his father? (131).
6. After the death of his mother and grandmother, he ponders his upbringing that was "cobbled together from so many different parents," and asks, "Who was I, really? (222).

7. At the end of the book he has two dreams in which he is a father, but he wonders, "Could *I* be a good father?" In his soul-searching he wonders, "And how could I take care of a child when I had no model for what a good father was? (238).
8. In the closure, when Robert wrote him a note calling Brando, "my son," Brando asks, "'My son.' Was I his son?" a question he asked in some form about each of the men in his mother's life.
9. When he connects with his biological father, who is now a loving father to Kereny, Adriana, and Natalie, he asks, "Was there an inability to reconcile the kindly, present father they knew with the absentee one I didn't?"
10. Adriana's husband John told Brando that Candido was "like a father" to him, prompting Brando to wonder, "How many men had *I* chased to be 'like a father' to me? Was I doing the same with my own father?"

III. QUOTATIONS FROM THE BOOK

These passages point to insights Brando is sharing with his reading audience. Elaborate on the quotation to explain how it relates to his life.

1. "I thought family members were like trading cards. You collected names, and maybe you'd stumble onto one you cherished, but otherwise they'd just sit there crammed away somewhere, to be brought out simply as something to make other people envious "(55).
2. "Besides Paul, I stockpiled other men as prominent father surrogates, *Just* in case" (124).
3. His mother pleaded, "*Tell me you have the answers I need, Brando. She knew I didn't want the answers my mother had for me anymore*" (139).
4. "I thought more about Pat's wallet than his fatherhood, but my mother had taught me a simple thing throughout my life so far: money equals love" (165).
5. His mother's mantra rationalized, "At least it's never boring" (172).
6. "Even in the grips of a total breakdown, I had to stay practical about how to destroy myself" (192).

7. "I had no reason to trust someone who had lied and abandoned me, but I couldn't help myself" (196).
8. "'Rudy's loyal,' she told me. 'You could learn something about loyalty from him. Every day you become less and less my son'" (201). "You're the most selfish person I've ever known" (203). "I wish I had left you like your father,' my mother said" (204).
9. "I had years of practice losing fathers. I had a lifetime to learn how to try to live with my mother. I had a day to learn how live without her. Then another day. And another. And another" (210).
10. "I learned, slowly, how to acknowledge and embrace being a Mexican who happened to be raised as a mother's kind of Indian. This was just as difficult as inventing a new family" (222).
11. Referring to his father's abandonment of him as a toddler and then Candido's inability to be that father when he was reunited, the author says, "His one crime was that he couldn't be that father to me. But who was left to pay for that crime? I knew what had happened, but knowing the past doesn't fix it. It won't even let you mourn for what might have happened instead. You cannot change the past. The past has already happened" (233-34).
12. "I'm not an Indian either but feel I'm still somewhere between the two names and two cultures. It's difficult because I can't even occupy the grapy space mixed children try to claim for themselves" (240). "I am also between two father. The father who left me, and Frank, the father who stayed." "One has something I want; the other has something I need. I can't decide which father is which" (241).

JOAN REESE – QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Why, when Native Americans have been the victims of a terrible genocide and untold indignities, are they subject to appropriation by people like Skyhorse's mother, who finds some kind of romance in claiming kinship?
2. Why, after he knew he was not a Native American, did Skyhorse continue to claim he was?
3. Are there other well-known incidences of people who falsely claim allegiance to one Native American tribe or another? Why is this a phenomenon?
4. How have Native American writers responded to this memoir? Is it controversial?

MARTA MOORE – QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GENRE AND RHETORICAL SITUATION OF *TAKE THIS MAN*

GENRE

1. *Take This Man* is a memoir. Discuss the characteristics of the genre.
2. What makes Skyhorse's memoir unique? What new perspectives and insights does it offer? How does the author connect his personal life to that of the artist?
3. Memoirs explore and reflect on a central theme while telling an autobiographical story. What central question or questions does Skyhorse's memoir invite you to explore and reflect on?
4. What is Skyhorse's heritage? Why is his ethnic background important in his memoir?

RHETORICAL SITUATION

1. Skyhorse's memoir is about "a boy, his five stepfathers, and the mother who was determined to give her son everything but the truth". What is the rhetorical situation of his memoir – that is, the topic, angle, purpose, reader, and context?
2. Who is Skyhorse's audience? Is it only people from difficult childhoods or for those with identity challenges? Create an extended reader profile of the memoir that will give you a more in-depth view of the reader's expectations, values and attitude.

JULIE SEARS – SELF-REFLECTION IN BRANDO SKYHORSE’S *TAKE THIS MAN*

Brando Skyhorse writes this memoir to come to terms with the many stories he was told about himself and the different faces he showed the world. At the heart of the memoir are his relationships with his mother and grandmother, yet the over-arching narrative seems to be about the lack of a stable father figure in his life. For many people, familial relationships are an essential part of how one knows who he or she is. And knowing who one is central to knowing how to be in the world. The famous quotation “Know Thyself,” which is believed to have been written at the entrance to the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, commands us to seriously reflect on who we are and why we believe what we believe to be true or good before attempting to create a coherent philosophy to live by. From a psychological perspective, examination of the self with its many faults and shortcomings is the best entry way to understand the complexity of human nature. And being honest with oneself keeps one from falsely claiming wisdom, which was one of the dangers Athenian philosopher Socrates reportedly guarded himself against. Coming clean, confessing, self-disclosing, or doing a “fearless moral inventory” (Step Four of the Twelve Step Program) are all potential ways of getting closer to self-discovery.

THE FATHER QUEST

Skyhorse’s search for his father launches him on a mythic path; the path is well-worn, having been trod by legendary characters, yet it is a powerful journey all the same. The Ancient Greek epic *The Odyssey* features as a subplot the character of Telemachus trying to find his father Odysseus, who has disappeared after the Trojan War. Telemachus’ mother Penelope lives in a house that has been overtaken by suitors who are eager to win her hand in Odysseus’ long absence. And, although Penelope never wavers in her loyalty to her husband, the pressure from the suitors and their consumption of the family resources take a toll. Telemachus leaves his home behind to enter territory unknown to him. He does not even remember his father. He only learns of Odysseus’ greatness from the stories he hears about him during his journey. Telemachus’ search for his father is simultaneously a search to find himself and a way to rescue his mother from the greedy suitors. In the process, he develops into a man who fights off the suitors with his returned father. The *Odyssey* ultimately rewards the fatherless son with a father.

A contrasting narrative shows the dangers of knowing too much when it is too late. The tragedy of *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles hinges around a man’s ignorance of his true father’s nature. Blinded to his family background and

believing his adoptive parents to be his parents of origin, Oedipus leaves his family when he is told by an oracle that he will murder his father and marry his mother. He flees his family to avoid such a fate and rashly murders a man at a crossroads during his journey. Oedipus then comes to a kingdom whose absence of a king has left it vulnerable to the control of a vile monster called the Sphinx. When Oedipus cleverly liberates the kingdom of its monster by successfully answering its riddle, he is rewarded with marriage to the widowed wife of the queen and given the title of king. Many years later, a plague descends upon the kingdom because the injustice of the king's death has never been righted. Oedipus's arrogant belief that he can save the day by finding the king's murderer leads to his downfall when he discovers that he is the murderer and, appallingly, that the murdered king was his father and the widowed queen his mother. He did not "know himself" and pays the price. The lies he was told about himself were so convincing that he swallowed them whole. We discover that, for a clever man, Oedipus is very naïve. Unlike the triumphant ending that Telemachus enjoyed, Oedipus's father search led him to discover the worst things about himself. In the process, though, he does gain wisdom and humility.

It is important to note that both father quest stories come from the Ancient Greek culture, which strongly emphasized the father's role as head of the family and the one who could bestow property upon the next generation. A modern man with a mythic name, Skyhorse shares some of the traits of both Telemachus and Oedipus. He was blinded by stories about his family origin and knew nothing about his birth father until he was an adolescent. Monsters and greedy people took advantage of his family. Monsters existed within his family as well. Because his home was not safe, he yearned for a father figure to protect him. Skyhorse is not blind in his search, he recognizes that delving into his family's past will bring up demons.

ETHNIC IDENTITY

Besides knowing who one's parents are or were, realizing one's ethnicity is another way of understanding the self. During much of Skyhorse's early childhood (70s), many cultural movements were occurring, among them Black Pride, the Native American civil rights movement, Gay rights, the Women's movement, and the Chicano (Mexican-American) movement. These movements originated in the late 60s when members of ethnic and sexual minorities decided to advance their fight for equality through collective action. Consciousness raising, a term most associated with the Women's movement, meant becoming aware of how the culture in power keeps the minorities or disempowered people ignorant and ashamed of their position within the culture as a strategy to inhibit their political action. Consciousness raising began as small groups of individuals

realizing the commonalities among them. The point was to show that the personal experiences they struggled with were not isolated. The phrase “the personal is political” encapsulated this concept. Transforming personal experiences with oppression into collective action, these grassroots movements changed the political landscape and threatened the status quo.

Throughout the late 80s and 90s, progressive universities responded to these cultural movements to include studies like Asian-American Studies, African-American Studies, and Hispanic Studies, as a way of reversing historic inequities that privileged the history of white, European-based cultures. At that time and even today, these ethnic studies courses are questioned as being limiting, inaccurate, and disparaging of white culture. The conflict between those who argue for a multicultural education and those who do not has been a continuing aspect of higher educational life and a political flashpoint, particularly when regarding the adoption of text-books and college funding. Skyhorse adds his voice to this ongoing discussion by honestly dissecting his own hybrid identity.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why is the search for a father so central to Skyhorse’s understanding of himself as a boy and then a man?
2. What do you think his perfect father would be like? What would your perfect father be like?
3. Is Skyhorse’s need for a father a way of escaping his mother and grandmother? If yes, how so?
4. Do you think Skyhorse would be as obsessed with having a father if his mother hadn’t been so obsessed with having a husband? Why or why not?
5. Was Skyhorse’s mother wanting a husband or a dad for Brando? How does her narrative on this question change throughout?
6. How much does Skyhorse unknowingly take on his mother’s issues?

7. What do you think about the mother's pushing her son (and husbands) away and then getting angry about him/them leaving? What sort of psychological dynamic is going on here?
8. Do you understand why his mother thought being Mexican was less exotic or interesting than being an American Indian? What did she gain by taking on this other identity? What did she and her son lose?
9. At the end of the book page 240-41), Skyhorse talks about men of differing ethnicities seeing him as one of their own. Why might this be?
10. Do you think it matters who your parents were or what your ethnicity is? Why or why not?
11. How is Skyhorse able to forgive his mother, grandmother, and various fathers?
12. How did the storytelling/lying he received from his mother help him become a writer? Or did it hurt rather than help?
13. What happened to Skyhorse's mother that made her who she was? What about his grandmother?
14. What does the title of the book mean? Who is "this man?"

GARY WILSON – PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES, STUDENT DISCOVERY GROUP QUESTIONS AND CRITICAL ESSAY TOPICS

I. PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

A. SURVIVING, COPING, AND OVERCOMING THEMES

What makes a good memoir? As Brando Skyhorse reveals in his memoir, the creative and cognitive act of writing about his life surfaces powerful insights about his life journey of self-realization. Memoirs force us to face the reality of those elements that we have survived or overcome. Memoirs help both their authors and readers appreciate that lurking beneath the surface story of events is a more intrinsic story of truth. This truth often results from a candid attempt to both narrate and to make sense of life's experiences.

Brando grew up in less than desirable circumstances with less than desirable role models. The author's own accounts of his youthful coping through lying and also playing one relative off of the other to avoid rebuke reveals a very facile mind. So, how does Brando survive his childhood and the lack of meaningful adult guidance from a self-destructive mother, a sometimes hateful grandmother, and a series of step-fathers? Brando survived and coped by taking sides and acting as the wise child who learned to survive emotionally rather than being victimized. More importantly, what does Brando learn from his experiences and how does his written words facilitate an understanding of who he was, who is, and who he is becoming?

Candid and honest memoirs create degrees of self-awareness. Expressed in another way, the emotional hardships that Brando experiences and narrates helps him cope in meaningful ways that fended off the self-annihilation of drugs and other negative outcomes. What really matters in a deeper sense comes from the author's ability to make meaning of what happened throughout his life.

B. The Power of the Journey: Archetypal Criticism

It is not difficult to recognize that we can instruct and critique the memoir through archetypal criticism. Brando's life represents the archetype of the heroic journey through life. Students will identify with this approach as you focus how everyone encounters numerous situations, both good and bad, that

constitute each person's own unique journey. Attending college, working at a job, and acquiring friends can be both good and not-so-good aspects of life which everyone must learn from and lean into, instead of falling away. The sum of our lives is often the collective sum of our "journeys" in life. Brando's "quest" for his biological father Candido can be viewed as a quest for truth and reconciliation in an uncaring world.

Using the lens of archetypal characterization provides another dimension of appreciating the memoir. Grandmother June, Mother Maria, (biological) Father Candido, and mentor Frank, as well as others, connect with our collective consciousnesses of persons and family role models. The wise (albeit sometimes not so loving) Grandmother and the egocentric and self-destructive Maria represent the polarizations between the good nurturing and bad self-consuming Madonna archetypes. As a character archetype, Candido represents the once errant, but now repentant, father with a reconciling nature. Frank, as the well-meaning and kind mentor represents the guiding father-figure whose own wisdom helps him see beyond the confines of Brando's own circumstances.

Most students enjoy archetypal criticism of stories as they can recognize character types and situations that are universal to all people and cultures.

II. DISCOVERY GROUP COLLABORATION (4 STUDENTS)

1. Within each assigned discovery group in your class, have your students argue if they believe Brando is a "reliable" narrator in recounting the situations he undergoes. Do they have a sense that Brando is faithful and truthful to the situations in his life as he perceives them? Do they find passages in the author's narrative where they believe he is masking (hiding) the truth?
2. "You have to take what life gives you and make the best of it." Within each assigned discovery group, ask students to argue how the phrase above focuses what Brando thinks and does at various periods from childhood to adulthood as recounted in his memoir.
3. Within each assigned discovery group, challenge each group to argue how Brando's experiences while growing up influenced his young adult life as a college student at Stanford University. Did his past life create any problems,

emotionally or psychologically, for him? How did he emotionally and mentally handle being a college student and returning home occasionally? Did his past life experiences create any negative issues that he had to overcome?

4. Within each discovery group, have students argue how the title of the memoir influences the narrator's perceptions and ideas about manhood and male role models? Challenge each group to derive several dimensions of meaning in the memoir based on the students' critiques of the dynamics of husband, father, and son.

5. Within each discovery group, challenge students to think about how the concept of cultural identity can strongly affect a person's notion of self. Have your students argue how cultural identity affects Brando. Is Maria's choice to be Native American a positive or negative influence on Brando's life?

6. Within each discovery group, challenge students to think about the dynamics of a dysfunctional family that the author experienced. Challenge them to argue how Brando overcame such familial issues and successfully graduated from college. Have them argue if they believe Brando has completely overcome his past, or is he still dealing with it.

III. CRITICAL ESSAY TOPICS

1. ESSAY TOPIC #1: As the author picks up the broken fragments of his life and tries to make peace with all of his fathers, especially his biological one, he comes to acknowledge that the one truth that his storytelling mother and grandmother had known instinctively: "stories [could] help you survive . . . and transform your life . . . from where you are into wherever you want to be."

Identify several occurrences in the memoir where Skyhorse uses the power of the story to survive the negative influences with which he daily contends. Argue how his own ability to transform the negative realities of life helped him cope and achieve self-awareness and a meaningful personhood. In-text cite at least four key passages in the memoir to support your claims.

2. ESSAY TOPIC #2: The author portrays his grandmother as supportive—encouraging his love of books, as one example—and at other times she was cruel to him. How would you describe their relationship? Based on your critical reading of the memoir, argue if Grandmother June is more of a positive or a negative influence in her grandson’s life?

In-text cite at least four key passages or episodes in the memoir to support your critical claims.

3. ESSAY TOPIC #3: Reconciliation is an important aspect in overcoming negative aspects in life and "healing." Argue which family member Brando might still have problems in dealing with at the memoir's conclusion. Specifically describe why you believe the memoir supports your critical claim.

In-text cite at least four key passages in the memoir to support critical claims.

4. ESSAY TOPIC #4: In his memoir, Brando Skyhorse narrates his journey to acquire and understand the truths about his own fragmented life and family. While each journey has several intermediary stops before its final destination, could we argue that the author has reached his "final" destination when he finds his biological father and brings some closure in his life. Based on your critical reading of the memoir, argue if you believe Brando reaches his final destination—or is he still searching for answers and truths about himself and life?

Support your critical claims by in-text citing at least four passages in the memoir to support your thesis.

READING AND WRITING ASSIGNMENT

This assignment asks students to write an argument essay which deals in some way with racial and/or cultural passing in the United States using sources from multiple print and web-based sources. The initial readings are intended to introduce the concepts of passing, Brando Skyhorse, and *Take This Man*. The sources in the 2nd section are offered to help students find and begin to develop their argument for the essay. It is not expected that students will use more than a few of later sources as they will likely chose a couple and then head off into directions all their own.

1. READ EACH OF THESE WORKS

Skyhorse, Brando. *Take This Man*. Simon and Schuster, 2014.

"Passing (Racial Identity)." *Wikipedia*, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passing_\(racial_identity\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passing_(racial_identity)). Accessed 19 Aug. 2017.

"Chapter 7: The Many Dimensions of Hispanic Racial Identity." Pew Research Center, 11 June 2015, www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/06/11/chapter-7-the-many-dimensions-of-hispanic-racial-identity/.

"*Take This Man*: Uncovering a Mother's Reinventions." NPR, 07 June 2014, www.npr.org/2014/06/07/319418859/take-this-man-uncovering-a-mothers-reinventions.

2. BEGIN INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH LOOKING AT SOME OF THE FOLLOWING SUGGESTIONS AND ANY OTHERS FOUND CREDIBLE AND SUPPORTIVE TO THE ESSAY'S POTENTIAL ARGUMENT:

Coleman, Arica L. "What You Didn't Know about Loving vs. Virginia." *Time*, 10 June 2016, time.com/4362508/loving-v-virginia-personas/.

Frank, Reanne, et al. "Latino Immigrants and the U.S. Racial Order: How and Where Do They Fit In?" *American Sociological Review*, vol. 75, no. 3, 2010, pp. 378–401. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/27801532.

Campbell, Mary E., and Lisa Troyer. "The Implications of Racial Misclassification by Observers." *American Sociological Review*, vol. 72, no. 5, 2007, pp. 750–765. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25472490.

Opposing Viewpoints in Context database, search term: racial identity.

Johnson, Kirk, et al. "Rachel Dolezal, in Center of Storm, Is Defiant: 'I Am Black'." *New York Times*, 16 June 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/06/17/us/rachel-dolezal-nbc-today-show.htm.

Boyden, Joseph. "Who Gets to Be Indigenous?" *Maclean's*, vol. 130, no. 9, Sept. 2017, pp. 36-70. EBSCOhost, web.b.ebscohost.com.library.collin.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&sid=c7c6a8c2-3a0a-4b80-ba73-793cc961efdd%40sessionmgr101.

Sandweiss, Martha A. *Passing Strange*. Penguin, 2009.

Mukherjee, Bharathi. Jasmine. Gross, 1989. Roth, Philip. *The Human Stain*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000.

Twain, Mark. *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Penguin, 1894.

Dr. Seuss, *The Sneetches and Other Stories*. Random House, 1954.

Nagel, Joane. "Problematics of American Indian Identity." *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture*. Oxford UP, 1997. pp. 234-48.

The Human Stain. Directed by Robert Benton, performances by Anthony Hopkins, Nicole Kidman, and Gary Sinise, Miramax, 2003.

Lost Boundaries. Directed by Alfred L. Werker, performances by Beatrice Pearson, Mel Ferrer, and Susan Douglas Rubes, Independent, 1949.

Illusions. Directed by Julie Dash, performances by Lonette McKee, Roseann Katon, and Ned Bellamy, Independent, 1982.

"TEDxEMU—Justin Ford—Pedagogy of Privilege." *YouTube*, 11 Apr. 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=JW9ey3N924Q.

3. WRITE AN ESSAY THAT MAKES A CLEAR ARGUMENT ABOUT SOME ASPECT OF RACIAL OR CULTURAL PASSING IN THE BOOK TAKE THIS MAN OR IN GENERAL IN THE UNITED STATES.

The page count is five and the number of sources from multiple sources should be at least eight. MLA style documentation is required. First drafts will be due two weeks before midterm through the Canvas tab for this essay assignment. Professor will post comments on Canvas within a week. Second drafts will be peer reviewed on hard copies on the first class day of the week of midterm, and the final copy will be due through Canvas on the last day of class the week of midterm. See course calendar for exact dates. Essay drafts are worth 25 points each and the final essay is worth 100 points.

SHORT ESSAY

When Sophie learns that Brando is not Native American and is in fact Mexican, what is her reaction? Later she explains this reaction. What is her explanation? How does her reaction validate his mother's choice to hide their Mexicanness?

1. Think about each of Brando's fathers. List at least one strong characteristic for each individual. List at least one negative characteristic for each. In at least a paragraph, explain how, when compiled, the strong characteristics do or do not have equal a sufficient singular father for Brando.
2. In at least two paragraphs, compare and contrast the mothering styles of Brando's mother and grandmother. Use specific examples from the text.
3. By the end of the book, how does Brando feel about his mother? His grandmother? Use specific examples from the text to support your responses. Explain how the author's final "thankyous" support or contradict your previous responses.
4. When he's finally able to talk to his biological father, Brando is told why he was abandoned. Is the reason his father gives for leaving him sufficient? Why or why not? Use examples from the text to support your response.

SHORT QUESTIONS

5. Who is Brando's biological father?
6. Which father knows the most about and has the most lasting relationship with Brando?
7. Who is the first father that Brando actually remembers?

8. Who is Emilio?
9. Brando's mother works one particular job for a long period of time. What job is this?

ESSAY QUESTION

The text for this class, *Everything's An Argument with Readings*, explores many ways of approaching argument. Skyhorse makes several different arguments in his memoir. Identify one and discuss it in detail, using the text to support your claim.

RYAN FLETCHER – A COMPARISON AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND/OR WRITING

COMPARISON: *TAKE THIS MAN AND BIG FISH (2003)*

Take This Man and Big Fish (2003) share many themes, such as childhood, masculinity, fatherhood, and storytelling.

-After watching the film, compare and contrast the two narrators. What questions do they encounter? How do they overcome their misunderstanding? What do the two narrators realize in the end?

-Storytelling guides both narratives as well. Is storytelling the same and/or different in both? Choose at least three examples.

-Both narrators also have caring parents. According to the text, what does it mean to be a good parent?

A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR DISCUSSION AND/OR WRITING

-Throughout history, fatherhood has been defined in different ways. For some, it's about being financially supportive and responsible, while for others it's about showing interest and being present. For Brando, fatherhood takes on various meanings as well. Describe his main experiences and how they are similar and different to other representations of fatherhood. Mention at least three other examples for reference.

-Storytelling controls much of the narrative in Take This Man. For instance, Brando's mother and grandmother invent stories that are often untrue, and Brando must discover the difference between truth and fiction. What power does storytelling possess in the narrative? How would you define storytelling after reading the memoir?

-Race, as a theme, surrounds Brando during his life. He is raised as a Native American, but he soon realizes he's actually Mexican. What is Brando's understanding of race throughout the narrative? Does his confusion about his own race/heritage limit him or liberate him? Please explain while using a few different examples from the text.

-Interestingly, part of the title of this memoir is a reference towards gender. Do you think many of the people in Brando's life subscribe to stereotypical roles, or do they operate as individuals? Please explain while using a few different examples from the text.

MELISSA BLACKMORE – SOURCES ABOUT BRANDO SKYHORSE AND TAKE THIS MAN

ARTICLES

“Off the Reservation: ‘Take This Man,’ by Brando Skyhorse” – *New York Times* - Book Review <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/27/books/review/take-this-man-by-brando-skyhorse.html?mcubz=1>

“Review: Brando Skyhorse’s ‘Take This Man’ Looks Back at a Screwed-Up Childhood” – *Los Angeles Times* <http://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-ca-jc-brando-skyhorse-20140615-story.html>

“Take This Man: Reading Group Guide” by Simon & Schuster -*Includes an interview with the author* http://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Take-This-Man/Brando-Skyhorse/9781439170892/reading_group_guide#rgg

“Brando Skyhorse: The Native American Who Wasn’t” – NBC News -*Includes several photos of the author and his mother* <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/brando-skyhorse-native-american-who-wasnt-n139541>

“Interview with Brando Skyhorse, 2011 Pen/Hemingway Award Winner” – The Hemingway Society <https://www.hemingwaysociety.org/interview-brando-skyhorse-2011-penhemingway-award-winner>

Ewing, Jack. "Take This Man." *Magill's Literary Annual 2015*, vol. 2, 15 June 2015, pp. 552-556. *Literary Reference Center*. -*Requires CougarWeb username and password off campus* <http://library.collin.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lfh&AN=110227364&site=ehost-live>

Hsu, Hsuan L. "The Invasion of Echo Park Rocks On." *Boom: A Journal of California*, vol. 2, no. 3, Fall 2012, pp. 56-59. JSTOR. *-Requires CougarWeb username and password off campus*

-Review of the Skyhorse's Novel (The Madonnas of Echo Park) with information about Skyhorse and the neighborhood where he grew up
<http://library.collin.edu/login?url=http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/boom.2012.2.3.86>

VIDEO/AUDIO

"Take This Man': Uncovering a Mother's Reinventions." – NPR (National Public Radio) Author Interview (Audio) *-Story – listen or read transcript for more detail*
- Length: 5:34 <http://www.npr.org/2014/06/07/319418859/take-this-man-uncovering-a-mothers-reinventions>

-Transcript
<http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=319418859>

"Brando Skyhorse, Snap #807 – Born Identity – WNYC Snap Judgement (Audio)
- Length 18:19 <http://www.wnyc.org/story/brando-skyhorse-snap-807-born-identity/>

"Art Works Podcast: A Conversation with Brando Skyhorse, Author & 2015 Poetry Out Loud Judge" – National Endowment for the Arts (Video) - Length 29:29 <https://youtu.be/IRsG0VXxrOY>

Brando Skyhorse "Take This Man" – from Politics and Prose Bookstore *-Reading and discussion - Discussion begins 34:30, Total Length 56:15*
https://youtu.be/urB3G_eWVu4

"Author Brando Skyhorse Talks About His Childhood" – NBC News – Length 1:18
<https://www.nbcnews.com/video/author-brando-skyhorse-talks-about-his-childhood-287815747630>

"The Madonnas of Echo Park': Residents, Reinvented" - NPR (National Public Radio) Author Interview -*Pertains to the author's novel 'The Madonnas of Echo Park'* -*Read transcript or listen to audio* – Length 7:20
<http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=128115588>

"Brando Skyhorse Reveals His Favorite Movie" – Simon & Schuster Books – Length 1:56 -*Brando Skyhorse shares his thoughts on "The Breakfast Club" and the effect it had on him as a child.* <https://youtu.be/139e11OZ208>

BOOKS

The Madonnas of Echo Park: A Novel by Brando Skyhorse - PS 3619 .K947 M33 2010 (Spring Creek & Preston Ridge Libraries)

How Did you Get to be Mexican? A White/Brown Man's Search for Identity by Kevin R. Johnson -Electronic Book – requires CougarWeb username/password off campus

<http://library.collin.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=51096&site=ehost-live>

This compelling account of racial identity takes a close look at the question 'Who is a Latino?' and determines where persons of mixed Latino-Anglo heritage fit into the racial dynamics of the United States. The son of a Mexican American mother and an Anglo father, Kevin Johnson has spent his life in the borderlands between racial identities. In this insightful book, he uses his experiences as a mixed Latino-Anglo to examine issues of diversity, assimilation, race relations, and affirmative action in contemporary America.

Latino Sun, Rising: Our Spanish-Speaking U.S. World by Marco Portales - E 184 .M5 P675 2005 (Central Park Library)

Now that Latinos are the most numerous ethnic minority in the United States and a growing part of the middle and professional classes, a Mexican American

educator takes stock. In the compelling details of a life truly lived--and a balanced, lively intellect that articulates itself in a society that often asks people such as him to choose between their American and Mexican identities--Portales inscribes himself into his people's experience. At the same time, he remains fully aware--and helps raise our awareness--that no one person's story can embody and represent the ancestral histories and the great worth and potential of all U.S. Latinos.

Growing Up Native American - E 98 .C5 G76 2002 (Spring Creek & Preston Ridge Libraries)

A collection of accounts of native American life by twenty-two acclaimed native American writers features tales, remembrances, and thoughts on the future.

Blood of the Land: The Government and Corporate War Against First Nations by Rex Weyler - E93 .W54 1992 (All campuses).

A history of the American Indian Movement