



Margaret Atwood: "Why We Tell Stories"

Margaret Atwood was born in 1939 in Ottawa, Ontario in Canada. She began writing at the age of six, and didn't attend school full time until the eighth grade. When she was 16, she decided that she wanted to write professionally and has since then written more than forty volumes of poetry, children's literature, fiction and non-fiction. Atwood is a known humanist, which is a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasizes the value and agency in human beings. This humanistic philosophy is present in many of her novels and works. Atwood often portrays female characters in environments controlled by patriarchy in her novels yet she believes that she is not a feminist writer because she doesn't only write about feminist topics. Atwood is an important player in global women's issues because she brings attention to feminist topics around the world.

"Water does not resist. Water flows. When you plunge your hand into it, all you feel is a caress. Water is not a solid wall, it will not stop you. But water always goes where it wants to go, and nothing in the end can stand against it. Water is patient. Dripping water wears away a stone. Remember that, my child. Remember you are half water. If you can't go through an obstacle, go around it. Water does." (Margaret Atwood, The Penelopiad, 43).

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Google earth

ENG/GBS/WGS 3298: Women Writing Worldwide Global Focus Mapping Project

Learning Outcome:

Become aware of current cultural and political concerns affecting women's lives globally.

Assignment:

As a class, students in ENG/GBS/WGS 3298 used Google Earth to collectively "map" contemporary issues affecting women worldwide. Students were assigned a country and researched it in the context of contemporary global women's issues, making connections to our course readings and discussion. Students then identified a contemporary issue/organization/news worthy event and related to women writers and/or global women's studies, locating it with a "pin" on our class Google Earth map. Each pin was accompanied by the following: a description of the map point; at least one web link; an image, video, or audio file; and a quotation from one of the course readings that relates to the map point.

After being assigned their country, students completed the following:

- Researched assigned country, paying particular attention to recent newsworthy events related to women, activist groups dedicated to women's issues, and/or contemporary women writers.
- After selecting a topic for mapping, students downloaded the free "Google Earth" software.
- Practiced dropping a "pin" to mark the location of the selected topic.
- Each pin was accompanied by the following information:
 - At least one web link.
 - An image/video/ or audio file.
 - A 100- to 200-word description of the map point.
 - A quotation from one of our class readings that relates to the map point.
- All the information was uploaded to a class Google spreadsheet.
- A link to the file containing the completed Google Earth map was provided via Blackboard, and students discussed their classmates' pins in an online discussion forum.

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Herat, Afghanistan



Women in Afghanistan

In "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" author Lila Abu Lughod brings up the idea that Western cultures tend to see liberating other countries as forcing their culture onto the countries they are trying to liberate. As American's we often hear about the repressed women in Afghanistan who are forced to wear burqas. While this may be true, in trying to "free" these women from being objectified, we group them together and fail to see these women as individuals. PolicyMic recently posted an article showing that there is more to Afghanistan women than simply burqa-clad women. It is important to keep from forcing our beliefs and culture onto other countries like Afghanistan, but instead try to understand them as best we can in order to help bring about change.

"...the questions is why knowing about the "culture" of the region, and particularly its religious beliefs and treatment of women, was more urgent than exploring the history of the development or repressive regimes in the region and the U.S. role in this history." (Lila Abu Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?", 598).

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Russia



Pussy Riot

Vladimir Putin's Russia oppresses women when most of them do not even realize it. They believe that the term "feminism" is an American term, one that is corrupt and made up to "disrupt the status quo." However, The Pussy Riot and Femen groups have been in rebellion of Putin's government system. Not long ago, The Pussy Riot was recorded as they were beaten by Cossacks at the Sochi Olympics as they tried to put on a protest performance. They risk their personal lives to rebel against the sexist government, trying to attract as much attention to the corruption as possible. The society of Russia pushes the idea that feminists are just bitter women, making their own lives worse by their actions. Those who stand up in Russia against Putin and his government are making the first step in attracting more awareness to the corrupt, machismo society.

"Our task it a positive one rather than a negative one. It is less about women as victims and more about women bringing about change for gender justice. It will quickly become apparent to you that wherever women's rights are violated, there are women who resist and rally for change, even in the face of social rejection and physical danger." - Introduction to Global Women's Studies, Pages 5-6

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Havana, Cuba



Cristina Garcia

Cristina Garcia was born in Havana, Cuba and wrote the book, The Aguero Sisters. This book tells the tale of two sisters, one who stayed in Cuba after the revolution and one who moved to Miami. Throughout the novel, Garcia points out the differences between these two sisters and combines them with aspects of magical realism in an interesting way. She combines these two very different sisters in creating the image of Oshun, mystical Cuban figure that is both known to Cuban Catholics and those who practice Santeria. At first one might think the sisters represent different phases of Oshun's identity but really the two works together to represent a new Cuban identity. From the time that Cuba was colonized and through the revolution, the image of Oshun changed with the identity of the Cuban people; for example, painted images of her became more light skinned as skin tones in the Cuban people started to change over time and as many moved to America after the revolution. I think this idea from Garcia's The Aguero Sisters relates very closely to ideas portrayed in Ana Castillo's The Guardians. The forging of a Chicano identity that encompasses both of these people's homelands made me think of this changing figure of Oshun. These ideas relate to my quotation because I believe that many people feel like the must become American in order to validate themselves as "people" but at the same time they struggle to reconcile their two cultures, and in doing so they ultimately create a third new identity.

"That's all every immigrant in the world wants, to get her papers in order. To officially become a person." (The Guardians, 116)

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