

Statement of Teaching Philosophy -Charlotte Eubanks

How do we find ourselves in this world? And how do we find others? My proposition, to all of my students in all of my classes, is a simple one and it goes like this. Literature is a tool that humans have long used – like a compass, a map, or a wayfinding song – to locate ourselves, to understand our surroundings, to try to imagine the lives of other people (whether in other places and times, or right here in front of us). With literature, we can find some sort of common ground on which to build relationship. Without stories, we are lost in this world. In beautiful dactylic hexameter, Odysseus teaches us all how to build a raft, how to steer by starlight, how to leave all that is comfortable (food, shelter, sex with a nymph for goodness' sake) and to launch ourselves into the odyssey that is called “Finding Home.” In his wordless graphic novel *The Arrival*, Shaun Tan helps us feel the heart-in-the-mouth confusion of immigration and the comfort that even fragmented stories can provide in easing that pain. Maryse Condé's transtemporal epic *Segu* ventriloquizes the griot's critical poetry to imaginatively restore a family history erased through the trans-Atlantic slave trade. We share our stories, or we are alone.

My goal as a teacher is to train students to see the materials that they encounter in the classroom as deeply interconnected with their own lived reality, and to engage the world around them in a curious and thoughtful manner. This pragmatic praxis has opened exciting and unexpected opportunities, both for my students and for me. For instance, the Japanese Ukiyoe Internship is an undergraduate research opportunity that I designed, in conjunction with staff at the Palmer Museum of Art, to challenge students in Japanese literature, art history, and history classes to use their expertise to research and catalog the Museum's sizeable, and growing, collection of Japanese woodblock prints, to develop teaching materials around those prints, and to prepare materials for undergraduate-led exhibitions.

I have long struggled with how to my area of expertise: classical and medieval Japanese literature. If my goal in teaching is to break down the perceived wall between what happens in the classroom and what happens outside of it, what relationship can I draw between 11th century Japan and our 21st century? I have begun experimenting with the role-playing game as a pedagogical tool in my Japanese 421 (Classical Japan) course this semester, for which I have asked my students, based on extensive research in secondary scholarly materials, to design an avatar in whose guise they navigate the Heian court. Decisions about their avatar's age, rank, gender, family status, religious outlook, and occupation have thus far generated intensive (and intense) discussions about gender-based violence, mental illness, the veracity of religious visions, and ideal structures of political governance.