

IMMIGRANT VOICES IN MODERN SHORT STORIES COURSE SYLLABUS

By Caroline Smadja

This course, initially designed for OLLI Berkeley months before the pandemic, centers around six living authors from immigrant backgrounds. Some, like Junot Diaz from the Dominican Republic, have gained international notoriety and may be familiar to you. Others, Daniel Alarcon from Peru for instance, you may never have heard of. All six authors were born outside the United States, all write in English as a Second Language, a fact that will provide a common thread throughout. Aside from Israeli-born Ayelet Tsabari, who lives in Canada, the other authors reside primarily in the United States.

Each week will center on a specific short story by a specific author. This course revolves around class discussion rather than straight lecture style. Study questions will be available 5-7 days before class to guide our exchange. The French-born instructor seeks to convey her multicultural perspective as well as knowledge of the short story genre through dialogue with participants. Clearly, however, the level of interaction will fluctuate according to the number of attendees.

The last part of each class will be devoted to showing video clips of the author, to provide a clearer sense of what has informed his/her writing.

This is exciting material, offering us unique viewpoints from around the globe. Most of the stories have a strong political component, transporting us to Communist China under Mao's regime, to Haiti under the military dictatorship, to Tel Aviv under missile attacks. The fact the selected authors are alive offers a wealth of visual resources on most of them, interviews, readings & conferences, etc. This will help bring each of them to life for class participants

Week by Week Outline:

- I. **HA JIN (China) "Resurrection," *Under the Red Flag***
- II. **CHITRA DIVAKARUNI (India) "Mrs Dutta Writes A Letter"**
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1998/04/mrs-dutta-writes-a-letter/377092>
- III. **JUNOT DIAZ (Dominican Republic) "Fiesta, 1980" *Drown***
- IV. **EDWIDGE DANTICAT (Haiti) "The Missing Peace" *Krik? Krak!***
- V. **DANIEL ALARCON (Peru) "City of Clowns," *War by Candlelight***
- VI. **AYELET TSABARI (Israel) "The Poets in the Kitchen Window," *The Best Place on Earth***

Main Objectives of the Course: To (re) discover 6 contemporary short story writers, for the most part little-known by the American public, who are all foreign-born and write in English, and learn about each of these writers' life and work in the process.

Instructor Bio-- Caroline Smadja, MFA, has been a literature instructor at OLLISF since 2015 and at OLLI Berkeley since 2018. She's been a teacher/trainer for over 35 years, including 10 years as Assistant Professor at Golden Gate University in San Francisco. She's specialized in teaching adults, working with learners of all backgrounds and nationalities. In addition to her MFA in Creative Writing from Pacific University, she holds an M.A. in English from University Paris VII, and an M.A. in History from UC Davis. A French native with an international profile, Caroline is a published author of short stories, non-fiction and poetry.