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*Teaching Philosophy*

I view the classroom as a transformative space; where students have an opportunity to question and challenge their identities and the structure of society. I aim to provide students with tools and skills to help them better understand oppression and inequality in the social world. I believe it is vital for students to interrogate their own identities, experiences, and opinions as they learn and apply sociological theories and concepts. I have taught both principles of sociology and women and men in society, and am capable of teaching a variety of other courses and subjects, including: urban sociology, social theory (including feminist theory and Marxist perspectives), public health and nutrition, qualitative methods, public sociology, sociology of food, environmental sociology, and sociology of popular culture.

I am prepared to teach a variety of introductory and upper-level courses. I would be particularly interested in teaching feminist theory and qualitative methods courses, including a class that uses feminist theory to inform empirical research. I would also be interested in developing courses that combine food, health, and inequality studies – such as food and gender; the social construction of health and nutrition; food social movements; and/or food systems classes. With these food classes, I would include a variety of community based

“Ms. Mycek was always enthusiastic and was very knowledgeable about the course content. Always prepared with a lecture, assortment of videos, or some sort of useful learning time in class.” *Student Evaluation from Principles of Sociology*

assignments and approaches to have students thoughtfully engage with the university, as well as the surrounding, community. Students would be required to do a version of participatory or observational research on a variety of occasions. For example, in my current gender studies class, students are required to observe a family meal and volunteer at a non-profit working towards gender equality in some way. I find these types of assignments open students’ eyes to aspects of the social world they may have never encountered or considered before. Moreover, they encourage students to turn on their sociological imagination outside of the classroom. I find that students are much more likely to analyze their social world from a critical sociological perspective after observational and participatory assignments, which ultimately deepens their sociological understanding.

I have extensive training in the scholarship of teaching and learning, including taking a semester-long seminar on “Teaching Sociology,” as well as completing workshops on teaching privilege in the classroom and creating a democratic learning environment. This year I attended the American Sociological Association teaching and learning pre-conference and received the SAGE innovation teaching award. This year’s pre-conference theme was utilizing technology in the classroom. I learned a variety of practical skills and further developed my teaching community. These experiences have helped make me keenly aware how important it is to understand the theory behind the lesson plan, as well as how vitally important active learning and fostering critical thinking is in the classroom. I keep updated on current research in the scholarship of teaching and learning and new teaching resources made available through the American Sociological Association and from scholars of teaching and learning.

One of the ways I incorporate diversity and critical thinking in my classes is through the use of voices from outside of the academic world. I believe that there are many different perspectives

“Wonderful teacher. Knows how to approach hard topics such as discrimination and oppression. Obviously excited about the course.” - *Student Evaluation from Principles of Sociology*

worthy of students’ consideration, and many different ways of knowing that can enhance students’ understanding of sociological ideas and theories. I encourage my students to challenge their preconceived notions about the human experience and to realize that each different viewpoint can deepen our knowledge and understanding of the world around us. I incorporate works of

fiction, podcasts, poetry, videos, and materials from social activists, music, and documentaries to highlight the voices of those who are often silenced or underrepresented. Pairing these resources with sociological theory gives students a deeper understanding of both the social world and the personal experiences of marginalized groups. Additionally, through these sources I am able to show my students that one does not necessarily need to be a sociologist to use a sociological imagination throughout their life and career.

One teaching strategy I use in all of my classes is to incorporate a version of a book club, having students read memoirs and novels to apply class concepts (a version of this assignment is available on page 15). I recently published a version of this assignment in the ASA TRAILS database. One of my main learning goals as an instructor is to help students cultivate a sociological imagination that can then be applied to the world around them, not just inside the classroom. I have found book club assignments to be a highly effective teaching tool both in introductory and upper-level classes for helping students build and use their sociological imaginations. To teach feminist theory and upper-level gender courses, I utilize books like Audre Lorde's "Zami," Roxane Gay's "Hunger," and Brittney Cooper's "Eloquent Rage" to deconstruct student's understanding of knowledge production and introduce standpoint theory and feminist methodologies. Students read one of a preselected number of books during the semester, meet with their assigned group members throughout the semester, present a collaborative group presentation on the book, and write a final paper that weaves together their experiences, class concepts, and analysis of the novel or memoir. I incorporate progressive due dates and check-ins throughout the semester into the assignment, to make sure that students are staying on track. Scaffolding the different elements of the project allows me to regularly check-in with them, work through issues, and keep open communication.

I am also committing to working with students as a mentor and advisor. I am currently working with an undergraduate student to develop and distribute a survey to local emergency food providers and housing shelters. I find that working closely with undergraduate students in this capacity can be highly beneficial for all involved, and that students are often eager to learn how to put sociology in action and that their insight is incredibly valuable. This type of one-on-one mentorship is a vitally important part of my approach to teaching, some of the best teaching opportunities can happen outside of the classroom. I am always as a student of social life, including from my own students. To be an effective teacher and scholar, one must continually reflect and evaluate pedagogical tools in order to share the relevance of sociology with students. While far from perfect, student evaluations can provide valuable feedback about an instructor's effectiveness. I use student evaluations to assess and improve my teaching methods and as a result my teaching style continuously evolves to meet students' learning needs. My development as an effective and respectful teacher is evident in my student assessments, which consistently indicate that I am knowledgeable and that I convey course material in a clear and enthusiastic manner both in and outside of the classroom.

"Sociology was pretty hard for me. However, Mari Kate was extremely enthusiastic and was very receptive and understanding outside of class."- *Student Evaluation from Principles of Sociology*

My aim in the classroom is to provide varied learning approaches and assignments to create an inclusive and thoughtful environment. My intention is to create a space in which all students feel challenged and safe to express themselves. It is through these varied strategies and personal reflections that I create a classroom environment and teaching philosophy that demonstrates inclusion and treats all members of both the campus and wider community with respect and dignity.

Principles of Sociology – Spring 2018

Evaluation Item	Instructor's Mean Evaluation Scores	Departmental Mean Evaluation Scores
The instructors teaching aligned with the courses learning objectives/outcomes	4.6	4.5
The instructor was receptive to students outside the classroom	4.7	4.4
The instructor explained material well.	4.6	4.3
The instructor was enthusiastic about teaching the course	4.8	4.6
The instructor was prepared for class	4.6	4.5
The instructor gave useful feedback.	4.5	4.3
The instructor consistently treated students with respect	4.6	4.6
Overall, the instructor was an effective teacher	4.6	4.4
The course materials were valuable aids to learning	4.5	4.3
The course assignments were valuable aids to learning	4.6	4.2
This course improved my knowledge of the subject	4.6	4.4
Overall, this course was excellent	4.5	4.2

*Principles of Sociology*

**SOC 202.011**

**Instructor:** Mari Kate Mycek

***Course Overview***

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the field of sociology. We will begin the semester with the core concepts and theories in sociology. Sociologists use these key concepts to better understand the social world. These core ideas will help us build a foundation that we can build upon throughout the semester.

We will learn about different sociological research methods, both how to use them and their benefits and drawbacks. The majority of the class will focus on various substantive topics such as race, gender, social stratification, and immigration (among others). During this class you will learn how to examine the world around you using a sociological lens. We will engage with a variety of different mediums to better understand the social world, including TV shows, movies, podcasts, and a novel. Through this we will work to understand how sociology is all around us and much more than just terms in a textbook.

"When everyone in the classroom, teacher and students, recognizes that they are responsible for creating a learning community together, learning is at its most meaningful and useful."  
-bell hooks

***Learning Outcomes***

At the end of this semester you should be able to:

- 1) Understand sociology as a discipline.
- 2) Use sociological perspectives to critically and skeptically examine the social world, past and present.
- 3) Cultivate and apply a sociological imagination to class materials and everyday experiences.
- 4) Express, both orally and in writing, your thoughts/ideas related to sociological subject matter.

**General Education Program (GEP) requirements for the Social Sciences Category**

Each course in this GEP category will help students to:

1. Examine at least one of the following: human behavior, culture, mental processes, organizational processes, or institutional processes; and
2. Demonstrate how social scientific methods may be applied to the study of human behavior, culture, mental processes, organizational processes, or institutional processes; and
3. Use theories or concepts of the social sciences to analyze and explain theoretical and/or real world problems, including the underlying origins of such problems.

### ***Required texts:***

- Conley, Dalton. 2015. *You May Ask Yourself: An Introduction to Thinking Like a Sociologist*, Core 5<sup>th</sup> edition. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. Fourth Edition. (*In the course outline as “Y MAY”*).
- Additional other required readings (i.e. articles, book chapters, etc.) will be available online or on the Moodle site (designated in the course schedule as [M]). Readings will be in PDF format or accessible through a webpage. The course outline (below) provides you with a reading assignment schedule. All readings are required unless otherwise noted and should be read prior to each class. Please check the course moodle page often for the schedule, assignment, readings, and updates. I will e-mail you with updates when possible, so please also check your NCSU e-mail frequently.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. 2014. *Americanah*. New York: Anchor Books, a division of Random House, LLC.

### ***Class Rules***

Sociology is a field that frequently addresses sensitive issues such as race, class, gender, etc. Keeping this in mind the class rules are as follows:

- *Be respectful.* Because we will be covering controversial topics in this course there is a high probability that at least one of your peers will have an opinion that differs from your own. I encourage active and thoughtful discussions on course topics but personal attacks, disparaging remarks, and rudeness will not be tolerated. This rule also includes common courtesy such as putting cell phones away, not talking while your peers or the instructor is speaking, and arriving to class on time.
- *Think critically.* Sociology deals with “grey” areas. This means with many of the topics we are covering there is no one right answer. If you disagree with something I as the instructor or your peers say in class I encourage you to challenge the statement in an intelligent, respectful manner.

I don't want you to  
think like me.  
I just want you to  
**THINK**



### ***Course Requirements and Grading***

### ***Attendance (25 points)***

I will take attendance at the start of every class period. This is an easy 25 points! Everyone is expected to show up to class on-time and to stay awake and engaged during the entire class period. You are allowed **2 unexcused absences, no questions asked**. Beyond those two class periods, you will lose a point for any class you miss. Use them wisely. Arriving more than 15 minutes late will count as an absence. You will also lose one attendance point every time I see you texting/using your cell phone during class.

### ***Participation and in class assignments (75 pts)***

Participation is key to your success, and the classroom experience, this is why it a significant portion of your final grade. That said, I know speaking up in class isn't always easy for everyone. If you feel particularly averse to speaking in class please come **talk to me** as soon as possible and we can work something out! You will be expected to make a meaningful contribution to most class periods.

#### **I will use reading quizzes and in class activities to contribute to your participation grade.**

These will be random and not announced prior to the class period. During class please be respectful of the views, experiences, and opinions of others. Many of the topics that sociologists study are controversial. While you are entitled to personal beliefs and opinions, the course requires that you develop a "sociological imagination." You do not have to adopt this perspective, but you will be expected to demonstrate your ability to use it. Laughing, making faces, or talking under your breath while I or your fellow classmates are talking will not be tolerated.

Part of your participation grade will also come from your book club group work. You need to be an active and engaged member of your group, as they will be evaluating your participation. I will average the total of your group members' assessment of your work.

### ***Book Club (100 pts)***

This semester we will all be reading the same book. You should purchase the book you are assigned as soon as possible to start reading. We will have various in-class activities related to the book club book throughout the semester. You will also present your book club topic to the rest of the class in a group presentation. Finally, you will all write an individual paper about your book club book. More details about the components and requirements for this project will be given during class.

#### **Book club book:**

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. 2014. *Americanah*. New York: Anchor Books, a division of Random House, LLC.

### ***Writing Assignments 100 pts (2 @ 50 pts each)***

There will be two writing assignments throughout the semester. These are meant to be fun and creative study tools to help you apply core concepts to the world around you. More information about these assignments will be given throughout the semester.

***Exams 200 pts (2 @ 100 pts each)***

There will be two in class exams: a midterm and a final. The exams will be cumulative and closed book. They will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. We will go over the exam format and the topics covered in more detail in class.

***Distribution of Points***

**Total Points: 500**

Attendance: 25 pts

Participation and in class assignments: 75 pts

Book Club: 100 points

Writing Assignments: 100 pts (2 @ 50 points each)

Exams: 200 points (2 @ 100 points each)

**This class uses the standard NCSU grading scale:**

A+	490-500 pts	B+	435-449 pts	C+	385-399 pts	D+	335-349 pts
A	470-489 pts	B	420-434 pts	C	370-384 pts	D	320-334 pts
A-	450-469 pts	B-	400-419 pts	C-	350-369 pts	D-	300-319 pts
F	0-299 pts						

***Course Policies:***

**Open Learning Environment and Non-Discrimination Policy:**

Diverse ideas and beliefs will undoubtedly come up during the course, and you may find yourself disagreeing with fellow students or the instructor. That's normal and expected. Regardless, I expect students to treat each other and me with respect and to work to make the classroom one in which everyone can feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. I will not tolerate any personal attacks, disparaging remarks, or rudeness during class. Additionally, during class discussions, students should not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or veteran status, as outlined in the University's Unlawful Harassment Policy Statement (available here: <http://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-04-25-5>).

### **Technology in the classroom:**

Unless you have requested special accommodations, I do not allow laptops or tablets in the classroom. For certain in class group work the use of laptops may be permitted, I will let you know if this case arises, but unless explicitly stated you should not use laptops or tablets during class. Cell phones must be put away and *silenced* (not on vibrate) during class. If I see you using your cell phone during class I will take a point off of your attendance grade. If you are the primary care giver of someone unable to care for themselves (a child, an elderly person, etc.) see me personally and we can discuss exceptions. If something is going on in your life that would require you to be available by phone during class (like a family emergency), please let me know.

### **E-mail Communication**

When you e-mail me about class please include the course number and issue of concern in the subject line and your name and course number in the body of the e-mail. Please expect a 24-48 hour turnaround time for a response, if it is during the weekend it may take longer. Please take into account that I do not check e-mails after 6PM Friday. If you e-mail me after this time, it will be not looked at until Monday morning. Please note that sensitive information (grades, specific accommodations) need to be discussed in person.

### **Basic Needs**

When students face challenges related to food and housing, it can be difficult to learn. The Pack Essentials program (<https://dasa.ncsu.edu/pack-essentials/>) provides support for students facing food or housing insecurity. Any student in this situation is urged to contact the Division of Academic and Student Affairs for support. Furthermore, please notify me if you feel comfortable doing so. This will enable me to connect you with resources, including personal support. If you want to discuss your situation and review available resources in a confidential meeting with the Student Ombuds, you can also schedule a face-to-face or phone meeting by calling 919-513-3401.

### **Childcare**

If you have care responsibilities for a child and your childcare needs come into conflict with the course schedule, please don't feel as though you have to miss class. I understand that sometimes plans fall through. If this happens, you are welcome to bring a child with you. I simply ask that you bring materials to keep them busy (e.g., a book, headphones and screen) and remain mindful of your classmates. If you have questions about this, feel free to contact me.

### **Late assignments, Make-Up Work, & Incompletes:**

If a documented emergency causes you to miss an exam or other deadline, you must contact me WITHIN 48 HOURS. You will then be given a reasonable opportunity to make up the work. It is

always better to contact me *before* missing something, if that is possible.

No late work will be accepted without a documented emergency. *If you hand in any assignment late, you will receive a 0.* If you come talk to me *in person, during office hours, at least two weeks before* an assignment is due we can discuss a possible extension. You are only allowed one extension per semester. If you are using one of your “no question asked” absences on a day an assignment is due you must e-mail me your assignment *before the start of that class period.* If you hand in the assignment during the next class period or e-mail it to me after the start of class, it will not be counted and you will not receive credit for that assignment.

In this course, an incomplete grade will be used in accordance with the official university grading policy, which can be found at [policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-50-03](http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-50-03). The burden of fulfilling an incomplete grade is the responsibility of the student.

### **Appealing a Grade:**

You are entitled to have any test or paper re-graded. Unless the re-grade is a matter of a technical mistake (e.g., incorrect addition), you must do the following:

1. Prepare a 1-page written statement specifically explaining why the assignment warrants re-examination, citing specific examples from the assignment
2. Submit the statement and the original assignment to me within one week.
3. Meet with me in person to discuss the re-grade. Be aware that your original grade could increase, decrease, or remain the same.

### **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:**

All students are expected to comply with University regulations regarding academic integrity. It is my understanding that when you turn in any assignment, you are certifying that you neither gave nor received unauthorized aid. If you are in doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, speak with me before the assignment is due and/or examine the University web site. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to: cheating on an exam (e.g., copying others' answers, providing information to others) or plagiarism (e.g., taking material from readings without citation, including from the Internet, or copying another student's paper without attribution). Be sure you know the difference between citing, quoting, and stealing from a text. Failure to maintain academic integrity on an assignment will result, at a minimum, in a full loss of credit for that assignment. Confirmed instances of academic dishonesty may result in failure of the course and involvement of the department. Other penalties may also apply. Students are required to comply with the university policy on academic integrity found in the Code of Student Conduct found at <http://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-11-35-01>. See <http://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-11-35-01> for a detailed explanation of academic honesty.

### **Accommodations for Disabilities**

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, student must register with the Disability Services Office (<http://www.ncsu.edu/dso>), 919-515-7653. For more information on NC State's policy on working with students with disabilities, please see the Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Regulation at <http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-01>

*Student Resources:* The following university resources are available to all students. I strongly recommend that students take advantage of them as needed.

- DELTA LearnTech: [http://delta.ncsu.edu/get\\_help/learntech/](http://delta.ncsu.edu/get_help/learntech/)
  - This is the university office that runs Moodle and should be your first point of contact with any Moodle-related problems.
  - Phone (9:00-5:00): 919-513-7094, E-mail: [learntech@ncsu.edu](mailto:learntech@ncsu.edu)
- Writing and Speaking Tutorial Services: [http://www.ncsu.edu/tutorial\\_center/writespeak/](http://www.ncsu.edu/tutorial_center/writespeak/)
- Academic Policies: [www.ncsu.edu/policies/sitemap.php#acad-pols\\_regs](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/sitemap.php#acad-pols_regs)
- University Career Center: <http://www.ncsu.edu/career/>
- NCSU Counseling Center: 919-515-2423

### Tentative Course Schedule

\*Readings and assignments are to be completed *prior to* the beginning of the class period\*

\*I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus or course schedule if necessary. All changes will be announced in class and through Moodle\*

Week	Date	Topic	Readings and Assignments due
1	1/9/18	Introduction and Syllabus Review	
	1/11/18	The Sociological Imagination and Sociological Theory	Reading: YMAY chapter 1
2	1/16/18	Goffman & the Presentation of Self in Everyday Life	Reading: Selections from Goffman's <i>Presentation of Self</i> (PDFs available via Moodle)
	1/18/18	Research Methods	Reading: YMAY Chapter 2

3	1/23/18	Methods Continued	Reading: “What’s in a name?” [M]
	1/25/18	ONLINE CLASS	Watch the assigned material and follow the directions to complete your online assignment and online discussion.
4	1/30/18	Culture	YMAY Chapter 3 pg. 73-90
	2/1/18	Media	YMAY Chapter 3 pg. 90-111
5	2/6/18	Book Club	(Bring 2 discussion questions!) Americanah: 1-100
	2/8/18	Socialization and the Social Construction of Reality	YMAY Chapter 4
6	2/13/18	Gender	Reading: YMAY Chapter 8 [M] Allen - “What is Gender?”
	2/15/18	Gender Cont’d: Gender, Sexual Harassment, and Violence	Reading: [M] Frye – “Oppression” Listen: [M] “Anatomy of Doubt” <i>This American Life</i>
7	2/20/18	Groups and Networks	Reading: YMAY Chapter 5
	2/22/18	Deviance and Social Control  Assignment 1 Due- Gender and Media	Reading: YMAY Chapter 6 Listen: “be the change” <i>Hidden Brain</i>  <b>Upload your assignment to Moodle by 4:30PM.</b>
8	2/27/18	Catch up and Review day	Please come prepared with questions or concerns.

	3/1/18	Test Day 1	<b>TEST DAY!</b>
9	3/5-9/17	SPRING BREAK!	Why not use this time to catch up on <i>Americanab</i> ?
10	3/13/17	Stratification	Reading: YMAY Chapter 7 [M] “The Problem with the poverty line”
	3/15/17	Stratification Cont’d/	Reading: [M] “Nickel and Dime’d”
11	3/20/18	Race	Reading: Chapter 9, [M] “Race”
	3/22/18	Race Cont’d	Readings: [M] Colorblind Racism reading
12	3/27/18	Education	Listen: [M] “The Problem We All Live With” <i>This American Life</i>
	3/29/18	Book Club	<i>Americanab</i> pg. 100-225
13	4/3/18	Family	YMAY Chapter 10
	4/5/18	Intersectionality	Reading: [M] “Why Intersectionality Can’t Wait” Reading 2: [M] “The invisible knapsack of privilege”  <b>Writing assignment 2 due! Upload to moodle by 4:30PM</b>

14	4/10/18	Food and Inequality	Reading: [M] “Food Deserts: What is the problem? What is the Solution?”
	4/12/18	Family and Food	Reading: [M] “The joy of cooking?” HOMEWORK: Food journal
15	4/17/18	Book Club Presentations	Race Group 1 Race Group 2 Class Group 1
	4/19/18	Book Club Presentations	Class Group 2 Gender Group 1 Gender Group 2
16	4/24/18	<b>Book Club Papers Due! (and peer assessment)</b> Test 2 Review Day	Review day
	4/26/18	Test day 2!	Test 2 Today

## Developing a Sociological Imagination through *Americanah*: by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

### **Abstract:**

In this semester long project students read, discuss, and analyze *Americanah* from a sociological perspective. In the novel *Americanah*, Adichie depicts the experiences of two young Nigerians immigrating to the U.S and Europe and the challenges they face related to their gender, class, race, and immigrant status. Through a close reading, in class discussions, a group presentation, and an individual final paper, students develop their sociological imaginations and deepen their understanding of a wide range of core sociological concepts like gender socialization, colorblind racism, racialization, and social capital. With every turn of the page, readers are drawn further into an engaging story that sparks a sociological imagination. Students who complete this project regularly discuss that they have never thought about many of the issues presented in the book and that it provides a touchstone throughout the semester to develop complex sociological ideas and better understand difficult concepts.

**Assignment Description and Explanation:** This is a semester long project with three different related activities and assessments to help students develop a sociological imagination and recognize, understand, and analyze core sociological concepts. As a class, everyone reads *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie throughout the semester. *Americanah* discusses issues of race, immigration, media, gender, and identity in an accessible and thought-provoking way. The novel follows two young Nigerians (a man and a woman) and their lives as they grow up in Nigeria and then travel to the U.S. and London. Of particular insight, the main character of the novel starts a blog about race in America, which provides understanding into both interactional and structural levels of racism from the perspective of someone seeing race in America for the first time.

At the beginning of the semester, students are broken into book club groups that each focus on a different sociological theme. The themes I use are race, class, and gender. Based on the class size, there are two groups for each theme (5 students in each group). Each group then concentrates on analyzing and understanding their theme during in-class book club discussions. At the end of the semester each group presents on these assigned themes. Additionally, students also write an end of the semester individual paper that explores a concept or theme from class of their choosing.

The benefits of this assignment are many. Incorporating a variety of different mediums in class can illustrate that sociology is all around us and is not limited to academic articles and textbooks. I encourage students to use their sociological imaginations to think critically and skeptically about their worlds, including the media they consume. This becomes a less abstract instruction by doing it all together throughout the semester, analyzing a novel that has seemingly nothing to do with sociology as a discipline. Furthermore, the novel provides the class with concrete examples for a lot of different concepts that may seem abstract, without relying on personal experiences of students. Given that I do this assignment in an introductory class that is also a general education requirement, many of the students will likely never take another sociology class. By analyzing a novel, I give them the tools to sociologically analyze the world outside of the classroom.

Besides the sociological value, *Americanah* is a beautifully written novel with complicated characters, rich descriptions, and a myriad of different types of relationships that allow students to analyze both at the interactional and structural level.

### **Learning Goals and Assessment:**

1). Cultivate and apply your sociological imagination to the experiences of the characters in *Americanah*.

Assessment: This happens throughout the semester through in-class discussions (both inside and outside of book club). On the first book club day, I lead a class discussion before breaking into smaller groups to discuss their prepared discussion questions. I ask them what parts of the book they were able to see from a sociological perspective so far. There are a variety of different topics that can come up during this discussion based on the students in the class. I work to ask questions and guide the discussion towards the core concepts we have discussed so far in class to make sure we are all on the same page. For example, I ask students to take a “personal problem” that one of the character’s faces in the novel and explain how it relates to the structure of society/ a public issue. Frequently, we discuss Ifem’s inability to get a job when she arrives in America as a public issue that she experiences as a personal problem. Through this discussion on the first book club day, I am able to better articulate and explain how students can apply sociological concepts to the novel. During this discussion, I emphasize this is the kind of analysis that I will be looking for in their final papers and class presentations.

Additionally, the last two paragraphs of their individual papers asks them to address this specifically. By the end of the semester and the end of reading the book, they usually are able to discuss and analyze how the novel helped them develop their sociological imagination clearly.

2. Understand what makes a good sociological discussion question and develop your own.

Assessment: The week before the first in-class book club, I go over the handout “what makes a good book club discussion question.” Everyone gets credit for submitting a book club discussion question the first time. I then give individual feedback on their submitted questions, and explain that for the next book club the questions will be graded on content, not just if you submit them or not. This gives the students an opportunity to test out questions and get feedback without penalty, and a sense of what kinds of questions make for good discussion during class with their peers.

Usage Notes: I have only used this assignment as part of a Principles of Sociology class. I usually have 30 students, majority of whom are freshman and sophomore. I think the book works particularly well for an introductory class because students are able to apply a broad range of different class concepts and theories.

Some concepts from Conley’s textbook that students should be able to connect to the novel using a complex analysis with a variety of examples:

1. **Goffman’s theory of dramaturgy:** Students seem to really grasp the concepts of Goffman’s theory when applying it to the novel. We see both the front stage and back stage behavior of the two main characters throughout the text. Because we see the two main characters front stage (through reading about their interactions with other characters) and their backstage (through the depiction of their internal dialogues during

these interactions), students are able to better understand concepts like impression management and fronts by analyzing how characters front and back stages differ depending on setting and audience.

2. **Social Capital:** Throughout the novel we see different examples of how social capital works. Students seem to further understand this concept through the different ways social capital is implemented in Nigeria, London, and the U.S. The power of relationships in achieving economic success is clearly depicted throughout the novel in a variety of scenarios and helps students debunk the myth of meritocracy. We watch as characters fail or succeed based on the level of trust in their community and the strength of their social networks.
3. **Agents of Socialization:** All five of the agents of socialization (media, peers, family, school, total institutions) listed in Conley's text can be used to analyze the novel. I've had students analyze the "agents of socialization" for their paper in two ways. Some students chose to focus on one agent of socialization and go into great detail into the ways characters are influenced and interact with it throughout the novel. For example, media plays a big role in the immigration expectations for the main character and her socialization into U.S. norms. I encourage students to take this path because it allows them to go deeper into an analysis and really develop a thesis statement with sufficient evidence from the book. I've also had students connect all the different agents of socialization in one paper, using about a paragraph or two for each agent. I find students have a harder time maintaining a strong argument when they chose this option because it takes more time to make the paper cohesive. That being said, I think it is a good approach if the student is willing to put in the time it takes to make it a successful paper.

This assignment could work equally as well for upper-level classes on topics of immigration, race, social stratification, and gender. The assignment as it is written now asks students to engage with a variety of broad topics and develop a sociological imagination. In more specific classes, instructors could tailor discussion and the assignment to focus on more advanced and tailored concepts and theories. Furthermore, instructors can change the group themes to suit their needs. In past semesters, I have also had groups assigned the themes: immigration, education, and intersectionality.

Some more advanced concepts that students should be able to connect to the novel using a complex analysis with a variety of examples:

1. **Racialization:** One of the prominent themes throughout the novel is the main characters changing understanding race. Her experiences with race in Nigeria and the U.S. differ considerably, and these differences can work as an example of how race is socially constructed.
2. **Color-blind Frames (from *Racism without Racists* by Bonilla-Silva):** Similar to the agents of socialization, students can develop an argument using the frames articulated Bonilla-Silva in two ways. Some students have applied all of the frames, while others chose one to develop a deeper analysis. For instance, examples of the frame "avoiding racist language" can be seen throughout the book and analyzed accordingly. Many of these examples happen to minor characters, such as the main character's young nephew as he must navigate being a young black boy in a predominately white suburban school. Students seem to really grasp how covert racism can work by seeing it so effectively portrayed in the novel.
3. **Gender accountability:** While there are many different ways to analyze the novel from a gender perspective, looking into how characters are held accountable for doing gender in "appropriate" ways works well. In particular, the main character acts in "unfeminine" ways and students can analyze how the people around her use informal and formal social control to try to steer her towards a more culturally acceptable performance of femininity. This gender accountability happens throughout her life, in both the U.S. and Nigeria.

I introduce the book club project on the first day of class. I go over the details and assign groups during Week 2. I let the students rank their choices for groups and can usually accommodate most requests. In the syllabus schedule, I include a guideline for different reading points (e.g. by Week 6 you should have read the first 125 pages of the book). I usually aim for 5 students per group.

I use Dalton Conley's *You May Ask Yourself* as the main text for class. For the individual paper students are encouraged to use the terms used in the textbook to guide their analysis. Given the

broad spectrum of themes and concepts related to sociology in the novel, I believe the assignment can be adapted to supplement other textbooks as well.

A possible downside of this assignment is that the novel is long and some students are frustrated because of the extra reading. Some students love reading the novel, others find it burdensome. Though some of my students who initially found it burdensome expressed at the end of the semester that they enjoyed the novel after all. If students seem very concerned over how long the novel is, I try to assuage these concerns by breaking down the novel into how many pages they would have to read per day to make it seem more manageable.

### **Assignment details and instructions to give to students**

#### Book Club Guidelines

##### ***Part 1: Group Work***

Clubs will meet in class three times over the semester. You can meet outside class too, if your discussion gets exciting. Each club is responsible for conducting useful discussions about their book. **Members should bring in their copies of the book and any notes to meetings, along with 3 prepared question for discussion.** You will submit your discussion questions before class on Moodle, if they are submitted after 4:30PM on the day they are due you will not receive credit. These will count towards your book club grade. You must read the required section of the book in advance of book club meetings. You will spend the first 30 minutes engaging in discussion about the book and how it relates to class materials. You can use part of the time to work on planning your group presentation. You will have to meet at other times outside of these class meetings to work on your class presentation. These in class meetings are meant to help you get a good start and stay connected with your group members.

##### ***Part 2: In class presentation***

Each group is responsible for preparing an in-class presentation on their assigned topic. This could be a Powerpoint presentation, a short video, a skit, or a written document (possibly with pictures). If you have an idea you aren't sure about, just ask! We will talk about your group presentations on the second in class book club meeting, to make sure everyone has an idea and has been thinking about what the presentation will entail. Also, please feel free to come talk to me to get feedback on your ideas.

Your groups presentation should include the most relevant and/or interesting aspects of the book, excerpts or stories from the book that you feel are especially important to your theme, and background information (i.e., graphs, pictures, even newspaper articles) that helps give context about your group's theme. The background information should come from class materials and materials your group has found outside of class. You should look up academic articles about your theme using the library or library website. You can also include non-academic articles from reliable sources that discuss your theme to provide context.

Your presentation should show how your group has thought about the book in complex, multifaceted ways to explore how literature in a culture intersects with society at large. The class presentation should be between 10-15 minutes.

Your presentation should end with 3-4 meaningful discussion questions directly related to your book theme. Your group should choose an open-ended question or series of questions that is intended to generate debate and lively conversation. These questions will be used in class discussion.

### ***Part 3: Individual Paper***

Along with the in class group presentation, you will also be responsible for writing an individual paper that you will hand in. ***This part of the assignment is to be completed alone.***

This paper will ask you to apply the core class concepts to your book club book. I want you to write a 3-4 page paper (800-1200 words) that connects your book club book to a class concept or idea.

You should start the paper by briefly describing the storyline of the book and what *you* found to be most interesting (1-2 paragraphs). I've read the book and we've all seen your class presentations at this point, so please do not just summarize the book. This part of the assignment is more about you explaining what *you personally* got out of the book, what you thought to be the most interesting and important part.

The next section of the paper should be your application of class materials (the bulk of the paper). Be sure to use **one very clearly defined and explained** concept from the course when writing the paper. It would be beneficial to add in additional concepts and terms to help develop your key idea, but you need to clearly articulate and explain the significance of at least one. Key terms can be found in the textbook in bold or from class lectures. Avoid "term dropping"; when using a term be sure to adequately define the term or concept and apply it to your paper. I'm looking for quality, not quantity.

You cannot copy and paste anything from your group presentation. This paper needs to be your original idea, if the topic from your presentation and your paper overlap too much you will not receive credit for the paper assignment. If you are unsure if it is overlapping too much, please come and talk to me.

For example, if you were to choose gender socialization as your key concept/idea from class you would carefully and thoughtfully define gender socialization and you might answer and talk about these types of issues in your paper:

- In what ways do the characters in the book fit (or not fit) into traditional gender norms?
- Explain and analyze an example of how a character's gender effected the storyline or interactions with other characters.
- How do character's hold each other accountable for doing gender in ways deemed socially acceptable?

Other possible topics to explore: colorblind racism, social deviance, Goffman's impression management (fronts, front stage/back stage, etc.) agents of socialization, media, social capital, social

stratification, etc. If you are having trouble picking a concept or trouble framing your argument, please come and talk to me and I can help you.

Finally, conclude your paper with a short discussion (1-2 paragraphs) of how reading the book helped you better understand sociology as a field and helped develop your sociological imagination.

## **Grading**

Book club is worth 100 points. The grade for book club will be divided into three chunks: As your instructor I will grade each book club presentation and the discussion questions. Grading Criteria for each part of the grade are listed below:

- **Presentation (30 pts):** This part of your grade will be assessed on creativity, knowledge, audience engagement, and professionalism, described in more detail below.
- **Group Work (20 pts):** Each group member will rate other members in terms of their participation as a member of the book club. Ratings will be based on whether you were prepared, on time, and participating actively in both discussions and the presentation.
- **Paper (50 pts):** You will be provided a grading rubric for this paper.

## Diversity Statement

One of my favorite class assignments is having students fill out a food journal and reflect on their food consumption from a sociological perspective. From introductory sociology to sociology of gender courses, I have used this assignment as a go-to option to promote engaged, active learning, in part because it often produces lively discussion, debate, and insight. However, the last time I used this assignment, my eyes were opened in a way I had not expected. I was walking around the room while students were discussing their journals and noticed that one of my most engaged students was particularly quiet. When I walked over, I asked him what he thought of the assignment. He shook his head and sighed, “I realized that I eat terribly, and that the only thing I ate yesterday was crackers and bread because that’s all I had in my apartment. I usually try not to think about food because I don’t always have enough of it.” I study food inequality, and I spent three years working as a research assistant on a project evaluating food insecurity, but I hadn’t fully considered if and how many of my students might be food insecure. Because this student was food insecure, my assignment made him uncomfortable. This was one classroom moment among many where I have been forced to evaluate how my privilege and positionality affect my teaching and the assignments I use.

In the moment, I offered my student an apology for the negative feelings that my assignment brought up for him and said that I would take his experience into account in the future. I work hard to think critically about my pedagogy and make sure that the materials, assignments, and classroom environment do not alienate anyone or perpetuate inequalities. While I think that making people uncomfortable can be a positive experience, such as when we are discussing hard topics that need to be addressed, I also realize the need to make sure that there is a balance between creating teaching experiences that make students question the world in new ways and fostering experiences that dehumanize or alienate people. After seeing this food journal assignment in a new light, I have altered my teaching strategies in meaningful ways. I now bring in snacks and leave them at the front of the classroom. On the first day of class, I explain to students that I understand how difficult it is to concentrate when you are hungry, citing studies that show the effects of hunger on the body and mind, and I tell them that I will leave snacks out for anyone who wants or needs something to eat. I also provide links to community resources addressing food insecurity in my syllabus, and I include a clause that asks students to tell me (if they feel comfortable doing so) if they are experiencing hunger or food insecurity so that I can try to help them. Studies show that food insecurity, hunger, and homelessness are increasingly issues for college students across the country, and as a scholar and human being who cares deeply about these issues, I feel it’s important/essential to address them in the space of the classroom itself.

Furthermore, I try to remain aware of the ways in which my teaching perpetuates or challenges the status quo. One of the ways I do this is going through my syllabi and critically evaluating the work I am asking my students to read and engage with, in order to make sure that my syllabi reflects my commitment to diverse voices. I often encourage my students to do this same exercise with other syllabi in classes they are enrolled in, and then report back on their findings. This stimulates a conversation about who are the gatekeepers of knowledge and how we can challenge, as students and instructors, whose voices are considered legitimate and worthy of inclusion. In introductory classes, I ask students to reflect on how and why the “founding fathers” of sociology are white men and why we are still talking about them so exclusively. I have been in undergraduate and graduate seminars in which every single reading has been written by a white man, and in these classes I have felt alienated, like my voice was not valued or appreciated. I try to keep this in mind when designing my classes, and I think about how students of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, and other disenfranchised voices might feel when walking into my classroom. I cannot

change the fact that I am a white woman or the perspective and experiences that I carry with me, but I can certainly be reflective of my identity and make sure that my voice is only one of many in my classroom.

Finally, for many years, I was also a student who balanced school with two or three jobs, and I try to design my classes to maximize all students' opportunities for success, through clear expectations, open communication, and attention/recognition of students' needs and other demands on their time and attention. In my Principles of Sociology class, I assign three short papers with similar formats and the same rubric throughout the semester. All of the directions and expectations for these assignments are laid out during the first week of class. I check in on a weekly basis with students to make sure they incorporate some basic writing lessons into the first few weeks of class, refer my students to campus resources such as the Writing Center, and offer students the opportunity to come meet with me in person to go over drafts of their assignments together before handing them in to be graded. I had a freshman in one class who utilized all of these extra resources and brought his grade up from a D to a B throughout the course of the semester. He later told me that he was very nervous about having to write papers but that the on-campus writing center (which I referred him to) and our one-on-one sessions helped him become a much confident writer.

My aim in the classroom is to provide varied learning approaches and assignments to create an inclusive and thoughtful environment. My intention is to create a space in which all students feel challenged and safe to express themselves. It is through these varied strategies and personal reflections that I create a classroom environment and teaching philosophy that demonstrates inclusion and treats all members of both the campus and wider community with respect and dignity.