

Humanities Meta-disciplinary Content for FYE Course: Template #1

Friendship and Its Complexities

Note to instructors: Consider this document a template that can be used for any number of different concepts. The thematic focus of this particular syllabus is *friendship and its complexities (and how the tools of Humanistic study can unlock these complexities for students)*. After Week 1's introduction to the methods and perspectives of the Humanities, each of the next 4-5 weeks will focus on a particular text or artifact to explore the theme of friendship from different angles and perspectives (other potential themes might include citizenship, sex, class, leisure, emotions, etc.). We encourage instructors to be creative and varied in their pedagogical methods, making use of discussion, small-groups exercises, role-playing, journal entries and postings, film clips, peer review, etc., to make the students' first experience with the Humanities as dynamic and engaging as possible.

The tentative schedule presented below presumes a Monday large class meeting, and two smaller "breakout" meetings on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Student learning outcomes:

- Think more deeply about what it means to be human
- Gain familiarity with different disciplines within the Humanities and their methodologies
- Acquire experience analyzing a single concept using the tools and perspectives of the Humanities

Week 1: Defining the Humanities

Humanities methodologies for understanding the human experience include:

- Primary historical and philosophical texts of experience
- Primary present-day evidence via interviews and/or observation
- Creative imaginings of human experience in film and literature
- Self-reflection and examination

Session 1 (Large Class)

Content of opening lecture: Introduction to the Humanities and its/their importance; Introduction to specific disciplines within the Humanities (team taught); representatives of each discipline (English, Philosophy, History) explain their respective approach(es). What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to think deeply about the human experience? How does each discipline contribute answers to these questions? This opening lecture/talk might include a definition like this one from Stanford's Humanities Program: "The humanities can be described as the study of how people process and document the human experience. Since humans have been able, we have used philosophy, literature, religion, art, music, history and language to understand and record our world. These modes of expression have become some of the subjects that traditionally fall under the humanities umbrella."

Knowledge of these records of human experience gives us the opportunity to feel a sense of connection to those who have come before us, as well as to our contemporaries.”

In-Class Writing Assignment: What Is (or Are) the Humanities? Without researching, reflect on what you think the humanities are, and what their value is. Why does anyone study or engage in them? What sorts of activities ‘count’ as being part of the Humanities? If you’ve never heard the term “Humanities” before, what do you think it means?

Session 2 (Breakout)

Overarching question: Do we go to college to get a job or become a certain kind of person? In what ways can the Humanities equip you to do both—to make a living *and* to live a meaningful life?

Readings (these are short enough to be read in class; assign a single reading to each group of 5-7 students; have the students read, discuss, and then report their findings back to the class).

- David Behling, “On Studying the Humanities: What Does it Mean to Be Human?” *Huffington Post*, June 5, 2012 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-behling/humanities-majors_b_1569600.html
- Interview with Rebecca Newberger Goldstein by Hope Reese, “Why Study Philosophy? 'To Challenge Your Own Point of View,’” *The Atlantic*, Feb 27, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/02/why-study-philosophy-to-challenge-your-own-point-of-view/283954/>
- Chad Orzel, “Why Scientists Should Study Art And Literature,” *Forbes*, Oct 28, 2015 (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/chadorzel/2015/10/28/why-scientists-should-study-art-and-literature/#3a75045147ee>)
- David Brooks, “The Humanist Vocation,” *New York Times*, June 21, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/21/opinion/brooks-the-humanist-vocation.html>
- “STEM Education Is Vital—But Not at the Expense of the Humanities” <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/stem-education-is-vital-but-not-at-the-expense-of-the-humanities/>

Questions for classroom discussion: What do these thinkers say about the humanities and its disciplines? What assumptions are made? Are their arguments convincing? Why or why not?

Session 3 (Breakout, cont.)

Readings: again, these are short enough to be read during class time; assign a single reading to each group of 5-7 students; have the students read, discuss, and then report back to the class.

- T. Rees Shapiro, “For philosophy majors, the question after graduation is: What next?” *Washington Post* (June 20, 2017): https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/for-philosophy-majors-the-question-after-graduation-is-what-next/2017/06/20/aa7fae2a-46f0-11e7-98cd-af64b4fe2dfc_story.html?utm_term=.83c7a09c3d33

- Jim Grossman, "History isn't a 'useless' major. It teaches critical thinking, something America needs plenty more of," *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-grossman-history-major-in-decline-20160525-snap-story.html>
- Paul B. Sturtevant, "History Is Not a Useless Major: Fighting Myths with Data," *Perspectives*, April 2017, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/april-2017/history-is-not-a-useless-major-fighting-myths-with-data>
- Steve Strauss, "Why I Hire English Majors," *Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steve-strauss/hiring-english-majors_b_3484409.html

Questions for classroom discussion: How do the humanities shape your job prospects? What are the transferable skills you gain in the humanities? Brainstorm career paths that draw on the humanities.

Last 30 minutes of Friday's class: retrieve your in-class writing from Monday. How would you define the Humanities now? What has changed in your definition since Monday? Be ready to share. We will revisit this question again in Week 5-6.

Week 2: Defining the course theme ("friendship") and exploring it through historical and cultural objects/artifacts

Definition: By "artifacts" we mean objects in our world that help us to understand the past, our culture, and the meaning of our lives. For this week, students will bring in a physical object that exemplifies friendship.

Key Concepts Students Should Learn this Week:

- How historical and cultural objects contribute to Humanistic inquiries (what can historical objects teach us about friendship?)
- The challenge of subjectivity in interpreting historical and cultural objects
- Tools for locating historical and cultural objects
- Techniques for analyzing objects

Session 1 (Large Class)

This opening class meeting has two goals:

1) Introduce students to the concept of "friendship" (What is friendship? What are some key definitions?);

2) Introduce students to how historical/cultural artifacts can be used as a way of examining friendship. For the second goal, each professor could model an artifact/object analysis to illustrate to the students how humanities disciplines analyze these items (e.g., friendship quilts, books as objects of communication, letters from pen pals, etc.) and what they symbolize about friendship.

Readings to be completed prior to class:

- “Three Types of Friendship according to Aristotle” <https://stpeterslist.com/the-3-types-of-friendship-according-to-aristotle>

Or: Aristotle’s Nichomachean Ethics: “Three Types of Friendship”

<https://aquileana.wordpress.com/2014/02/11/aristotles-nichomachean-ethics-three-types-of-friendship-based-on-utility-pleasure-and-goodness/>

- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, “Why We Need Things,” in *History and Things: Essays on Material Culture*, edited by Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery, 20-29 (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993) <https://ilk.media.mit.edu/courses/mas714/fall02/csik-things.pdf>

Optional: *Philosophy Talk*: “Friendship, with Martha Nussbaum”

<https://www.philosophytalk.org/shows/friendship>

End today’s session by giving students instructions for finding and selecting objects to bring/post for breakout sessions.

Sessions 2 & 3 (Breakouts)

Informal Assignment: In preparation for today’s class session, students will have chosen any historical artifact and written a brief analysis of it (they can either post about it, write a journal entry, or bring to a written version to class)

Instructions for students: An ‘historical’ artifact could be some cultural object, from either the distant or recent past. Find an object that tells a story about the significance of friendship for that community at that time. Examine the object: how it was made, how it was used, etc. What does that object say about that time, and about friendships at that time? Write a short reflective journal entry.

Breakout Discussions: Students share progress on object analysis. Small groups discuss findings and stumbling blocks. Each group reports to the whole breakout class. Instructor-led walk-through of successful artifact analysis; tips for those still working. [Revised version of the analysis due by beginning of the following week.]

Week 3: Using interviews and observation to examine friendship:

Key concepts students should learn this week:

- Application of historical and philosophical understandings of friendship to their own lives and the lives of others
- Complicating the notion of friendship by looking at cross-cultural, and intergenerational relationships, as well as gender differences in friendship.

Informal Assignment: Conduct interviews and observations of friendship in the world around you

Session 1 (Large Class)

This opening class meeting would focus on a whole-class discussion of The Ideal Friendship. Also discussion and decisions about interview questions.

Interview/Observation Instructions for Students: Set up interviews or an observation setting as soon as you can. Be courteous, and as flexible about timing as you can. Set aside at least 30 minutes, and communicate that to the interviewees (if doing an interview).

You will do a practice interview in class (Monday). Then, outside of class, you will find someone else to interview on your own. These interviews should be face-to-face. Skyping is acceptable.

1. You will prepare your questions in advance, during Monday's class discussion. These will be typed up and turned in, along with your summary of the interview. Avoid questions that can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no.'
2. Record full name, date, place, etc., of the interview so that you can properly cite the interview in your assignment.

You may also use observation as a method. Find a setting that might provide for interesting observations about friendship. Record elements of these interactions that demonstrate aspects of friendship: promote friendship, tend to perpetuate friendship and/or likely work to dissolve a friendship.

Standard interview questions students might consider:

What makes for the best/most valuable kind of friendship?

What would you say was the greatest act of friendship you have received (that you are comfortable describing)?

Please describe the longest friendship you have had, and suggest reasons for its longevity.

What are some challenges/complications of friendships, and how have you grappled with them?

What advice do you have for someone like me, trying to find and keep good friends?

[Brainstorm others ... in class]

Session 2 (Breakout)

As the students are conducting their interviews outside of class, today's in-class session would give them a chance to view videos and read personal accounts of friendship across borders, between generations, and within or between genders, as a way of informing the write-ups they're being asked to do from their interviews:

Videos:

The power of cross-cultural friendships | Nathan Roberts & Michael Kimpur | TEDxRapidCity
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zRGs8o8a5I>)

Lily Tomlin and Jane Fonda TED talk:

(https://www.ted.com/talks/jane_fonda_and_lily_tomlin_a_hilarious_celebration_of_lifelong_female_friendship)

Intergenerational friends: (<https://studybreaks.com/2016/11/29/much-older-younger-friends-can-change-life/>)

Interracial friendship: Frederick Douglass's friendship and falling out with white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison (discussed in episode 2 of *The Abolitionists* PBS documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7PXU7Gzi50>)

Friendships between heterosexual men and women?

Brigid Delaney: "Can men and women be just good friends?"

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/06/can-men-and-women-be-just-good-friends-tell-us-what-you-think>

Readings:

David Mura, "Secret Colors" (essay on Japanese-American writer's friendship with African American writer and their negotiation of stereotypes and misperceptions) (pp. 129-156 in *Some of My Best Friends: Writings on Interracial Friendship*)

Session 3 (Breakout)

In Class: Bring interview or observation experience to class for discussion.

Week 4: Using film and literature to examine friendship:

Informal Assignment: Outside of class, students view a film or read a short story that represents a complex picture of friendship, and then write a short (2pp.) analysis/interpretation of what ideas about friendship their chosen text seems to be conveying. What insights into friendship can imaginative literature/film give us?

Examples of short fiction: Susan Glaspell: "A Jury of Her Peers"; Hemingway: "The Three-Day Blow"; Proulx: "Brokeback Mountain"; Salinger: "A Perfect Day for Bananafish"; Salter: "Arlington"

Examples of films: *Lethal Weapon*; *Thelma and Louise*; *Ghost World*; *Rush Hour*; *Withnail and I*; *Jump Street*; *Frances Ha*; *Bridesmaids*; *The Help*; *The Women*; *48 Hours*; ...

Examples of secondary readings that students could consult for their analysis:

Luis Rodriguez, "Battlefields, Or is Friendship Greater Than the Colonial and Dominating Race Ideologies of Hundreds of Years?" (pp. 72-82 in *Some of My Best Friends: Writings on Interracial Friendship*)

Benjamin DeMott, "Visions of Black-White Friendship" (Ch. 1 from *The Trouble with Friendship: Why Americans Can't Think Straight about Race*; critiques the ubiquitousness of interracial comity in American culture as a form of papering over structural racism)

Session 1 (Large Class)

For today's session, instructors could ask students (who will have already read/viewed their text) to consider larger ideas about friendship in the text they're analyzing: e.g., the politics of friendship, particularly bonds that stretch across barriers of culture, race, gender, etc. What is required within cross-cultural or interracial friendships? What is the relationship between personal friendship and structural racism or other injustices (can friendship between persons of different races have an impact on political/social structures? What do people from different classes or social statuses or educational levels have to do differently to be friends? Can heterosexual men and women be truly friends with the opposite sex?); how are interracial relationships often represented in popular culture as antidotes to and/or evasions of structural inequality? Which groups benefit from visions of interracial comity? What power hierarchies are challenged and/or sustained? In what way might friendships between women challenge and/or be shaped by patriarchy? How might male friendship contribute to the perpetuation of a culture of sexual harassment and assault?

Sessions 2 & 3 (Breakouts)

Students bring drafts of their 2pp. analyses to class. Possibly have the students break into small groups and offer feedback on each other's drafts. Students could present their interpretations of what argument their text seems to be making about friendship, and classmates could ask questions to help the authors clarify and sharpen their arguments.

Week 5: Using self-reflection and examination to examine friendship:

Informal Assignment: journal entry: How have I been a good friend to others? How have I failed to be a good friend? What can I do to become a better friend to someone in particular in my life?

Readings:

Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism" (excerpt emphasizing "authenticity")

"The Limits of Friendship" by Maria Konnikova (on Social Media and Friendship)

(<http://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/social-media-affect-math-dunbar-number-friendships>)

Optional: Tim Raynor: "Be human: Heidegger and online authenticity"

<https://philosophyforchange.wordpress.com/2013/02/20/be-human-heidegger-and-online-authenticity/>

"Capstone" assignment: We imagine that the 5-week unit would end with some kind of final assessable essay or project that asks students both to reach their own definitions of friendship and to link that definition to the larger question of what it means to be human. For example: a 3-5 page essay might be assigned asking students to consider how the concept of friendship informs what it means to be human.

Students might be required to defend that view of friendship and humanity by presenting as evidence: historical objects; interview or observation material; quotation from film, literature, music; and their own reflections on personal experience. Such an assignment could introduce to humanities students the process of humanistic inquiry and the kind of tools and evidence that are valued in this process.

Instructions to students: What is your definition of friendship—an ideal friendship and an actual/complicated friendship—and how have the specific activities you engaged in (the object analysis, the interview, the film/short story analysis, etc.) shaped and informed that definition? How has your newly enriched understanding of friendship in turn expanded your understanding of what it means to be human? Finally, please also consider how your use of the tools central to Humanistic study informed the new knowledge that you’ve gained?

Possibilities include:

- Designing a magazine style “quiz” about what kind of friend/human you are
- Creating podcast episode drawing on own reflections of friendship, excerpts from literature and film, interviews, and object analyses
- Creative non-fiction essay examining theme of friendship from multiple perspectives