

# 411 Just Stories

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**Class times:** Tuesday: 12-1:50 p.m. Friday 11 a.m. - 2:50 p.m.

**Office hours:** TBD

*“We cannot restore the land without re-storying the land.” — David Abrams*

*“Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.” — Chimamanda Adichie*

*“If we don’t know where we are, we don’t know who we are.” — Wendell Berry*

## **Course Description:**

What *can* the story do? Are the stories we tell only *just stories*, or do they hold the possibility for meaningful change?

We narrate ourselves into existence; every culture tells stories and each person has a story to tell. But how do the stories we hear shape the way we think and the way we relate to others, the way we relate to place? What happens when someone else tells our story, or when we tell the stories of someone else? How do our narrative landscapes inform the way we relate to and imagine our communities, and how do our mediascapes support or obstruct justice?

We will engage in discussions regarding benefits and drawbacks of media representation and learn to think critically regarding how narratives are constructed on behalf of marginalized and oppressed communities. Together, we want to unpack and examine prevailing stances in journalism and environmental advocacy, including: “story will set you free,” “giving voice to the voiceless,” and “exposing injustice.”

We will build skills in documentary craft (Fridays) and analysis (Tuesdays). As we examine our own personal stories and positions as media-makers, we will travel to Gold Beach, Oregon, where we will listen to the stories of a community affected by pesticide drift. If, as Paulo Freire writes, “the world is a text” – what role does media play in transforming it? As media makers — as citizens with storytelling skills — can we create a more just world?

## **Operating Assumptions:**

- “People’s experiences of and knowledge about the world (including environmental issues) differs by race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality (and more).” Speak from your own experience; remember and respect that others are speaking from their experiences, which may differ vastly from yours.

- Be prepared to engage in material that may make you feel uncomfortable. We encourage you to lean into this discomfort but also to recognize your own limits. If the

classroom ever becomes an unsafe space, we encourage you to take care of yourself, and to reach out to us and one another.

## **Course Objectives:**

**By the end of this course, you will be able to:**

- Create a short documentary piece incorporating audio, photography, and video at a basic level.
- Identify ways in which media (photography, audio, video, text) contributes to a sense of place and identity, and ways it can be used to both support and obstruct social/environmental justice on the ground.
- Describe what it feels like to spend time on both sides of the lens or mike.
- Articulate your own personal ethical stance and aesthetic goals as a critical media-maker.
- Engage in on-the-fly problem-solving with other students as a team.
- Gain experience in community engagement and dialogue, and be able to articulate best practices.
- Reflect critically about your own identity and how you are affected by and bound up with social inequality and ecological problems. Begin to articulate the power you have to respond and to transform these issues.
- Gain professional development experience, presenting at an internationally-renowned conference.

## **Course Goals:**

“The world is made of stories, not atoms.” — Muriel Rukeyser

Our goal is for students to become critical media consumers and critical media makers – to really grapple with how the stories we hear and tell influence the larger, lived stories of communities on the ground. As we build technical skills in audio, photography and video, interviewing and production we will also develop critical skills to analyze a wide-range of stories that take up social and environmental justice issues.

As we begin to understand the constraints of media production and framing by working alongside local communities tackling environmental justice issues, we hope to unlock the possibilities for meaningful storytelling to create change.

If we can develop a language and a consciousness with which to approach the stories we hear and the stories we tell – *Just Stories* becomes a larger conversation about how we live in a globalized world with a multitude of interpretive communities. We believe the process of listening to and telling stories in a conscious and collaborative manner holds the keys to personal and community liberation, extending beyond the classroom to inform the ways in which we interact with our environment and contribute to our communities.

## **Class Schedule:**

**ANALYSIS**

**CRAFT**

## Week 1: Stories of Change

<p><b>T 1/5: Analysis: What <i>can</i> story do? What <i>should</i> story do?</b> <i>We'll introduce ourselves, start talking about stories and what they can do, and go over our syllabus!</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b> None!</p>	<p><b>F 1/9: Craft: Listening for Change</b> <i>We'll practice the skills of listening to, interpreting, and retelling stories. We'll also discuss our learning goals and begin talking about our 'positionality.'</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Paulo Freire. <i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i>, Chapter 2 excerpts Our syllabus</p> <p><b><u>DUE: Memo #1</u></b></p> <p>If you're able to, bring any audio/photo/video equipment you'll have access to over the course duration on this day.</p>
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## Week 2: Environmental Justice and Storytelling

<p><b>T 1/12: Analysis: What is EJ?</b> <i>We'll discuss and define environmental justice and its related topics, such as power and intersectionality. What does this have to do with stories? How are environmental stories told?</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Laura Park. "Weaving together Environmental Justice and Climate Change." Dale Jamieson. "Justice: The Heart of Environmentalism." Rebecca Clarren. High Country News. "Timber herbicide spray sickens a community."</p>	<p><b>F 1/16: Craft: Audio + Interviewing</b> <i>We'll learn to use audio equipment, talk about how to ask questions and lead an interview and then hit the streets to talk to folks!</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Listen to/read transcript of <a href="#">Krista Tippett interview John Lewis</a>, "On Being." <a href="#">Terry Tempest Williams. "What Love Looks like." Orion Magazine.</a> Sydney Lewis. <i>Interviewing the World's Greatest Interviewer: Studs Terkel in Conversation.</i></p> <p><b><u>DUE: Positionality paper Part #1</u></b></p>
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## Week 3: Witnessing and Framing

<p><b>T 1/19: Analysis: Regarding the Pain of Others</b> <i>We'll discuss the following questions in context of the assigned readings: What does it mean "to bear witness?" or "expose a crime?" What are barriers to witnessing?</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Susan Sontag. "Plato's Cave." <i>On</i></p>	<p><b>F 1/23: Craft: Photography / Video</b> <i>We'll work on basic photography/videography skills, practice the critique process, and explore how specific framing and production influences stories told through imagery.</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Annie Dillard. "Seeing." <i>Pilgrim at Tinker Creek.</i> John Taylor. "Problems in photojournalism: realism, the nature of news, and the humanitarian narrative."</p>
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<p><i>Photography</i>  Time Magazine, <a href="#">Photographer as Witness: A Portrait of Domestic Violence</a>  Kari Norgaard. <a href="#">“People find Climate Change too hard to think about.”</a> <i>New York Times</i>.</p>	
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**Week 4: Elements of Story: Break it down + Pack our bags**

<p><b>T 1/26: Analysis: Forming Questions</b>  <i>As we get ready to visit a community, how do we prepare? What should our approach be and what types of questions should we be asking?</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b>  Jamie Winders. “On the Outside of Participation: Power, Participation, and Representation in Oral Histories.”  Eve Tuck. <a href="#">“Suspending Damage: Open Letter To Communities.”</a>  Bill Quigley, “Principles of Partnership, Collaboration, and the Struggle for Justice”</p>	<p><b>F 1/30: Craft: Gold Beach Final Prep!</b>  <i>We’ll finalize our plan for this weekend, where we’ll be, what our approach will be and what kind of questions we’ll ask!</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b>  Gold Beach Briefing</p> <p><b><u>DUE: Part #1 of group project</u></b>  <i>Make sure you read our briefing document and come with a list of potential shot ideas, questions, and a role you’re interested in taking on this weekend.</i></p>
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**Fieldtrip to Gold Beach, OR:**

<p>Details to come!</p>
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**Week 5: More than a feeling: what rises to the surface?**

<p><b>T 2/2: Analysis: What’s the larger story we want to tell?</b>  <i>Having witnessed injustice, how do we move to speak out? How do we make sense of a tangled issue and begin to narrow our focus? Where do we focus our lens? What stories do Gold Beach folks need?</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b>  Ronit Avni. “Mobilizing Hope.”</p> <p><b>Watch:</b>  Julia Bacha, <a href="#">“TED: Pay Attention to Nonviolence.”</a></p>	<p><b>F 2/6: Craft: Paring it down: Inventory and Choosing Bests</b>  <i>We’ll learn the basics of Photoshop, Soundtrack Pro and Final Cut Pro, select our best footage from our trip and begin to identify themes.</i></p> <p><b>Guest Speaker:</b> Zaheena Rasheed (Maldivian climate/HR activist and journalist)</p> <p><b>Review:</b>  <a href="http://blackgoldboom.com">blackgoldboom.com</a></p> <p><b>Readings:</b>  TBD</p>
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## Week 6: Telling true stories

<p><b>T 2/10: Analysis: Truth? Whose truth?</b> <i>We'll consider the following questions today: Who decides what truth is? What constraints does the media-maker have as truth-teller?</i></p> <p><b>Listen (first): “Yellow Rain” <a href="#">Radiolab</a>.</b> <b>Read:</b> Kao Kalia Yang. <a href="#">The Science of Racism: Radiolab’s Treatment of the Hmong Experience</a>. Binyavanga Wainaina. <a href="#">“How to Write about Africa.”</a> Teju Cole. “The White-Savior Industrial Complex.”</p>	<p><b>F 2/13: Craft: Storyboarding</b> <i>We'll take our top selections and our essential themes and questions and work through a Storyboard for our shorts, and engage in group critique.</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Hearing Voices’ <a href="#">Story Structure</a>:</p> <p><b><u>DUE: Bring “best” media content selections, and think about what your selection’s “aboutness” and key themes are.</u></b></p>
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## Week 7: Breaking the frame: moving past victimhood

<p><b>T 2/17: Analysis: Victimhood and beyond</b> <i>We'll explore how we can move beyond the constraints of story and identify means of breaking through the frame. What power or agency do we have?</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Katrina photojournalism project, <i>Climate Refugees</i> excerpt Nathaniel Rich, “<i>Jungleland</i>,” New York Times bell hooks. <i>Reel to Real: race sex and class at the movies</i> excerpt Kirsten Moe. “Change Starts with Your Own Story.” <i>Yes Magazine</i>.</p>	<p><b>F 2/20: Craft: Production</b> <i>Our story starts to come together as we stitch together all of the elements we've gathered. Critique, critique, critique!</i></p> <p><b>Readings: none!</b></p> <p><b><u>DUE: Final Storyboard</u></b></p>
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## Week 8: Finding our voice: resisting to Transform

<p><b>T 2/24: Analysis: Stories of resistance</b> <i>We'll consider the following questions this class: Why bother telling stories? What can I do? How do we tell stories on our own terms?</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Only Good Authorship" Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury." <i>Sister Outsider</i>. Ursula K. Le Guin. 1986. "Bryn Mawr Commencement Address." K'naan. "Censoring Myself for Success." <i>New York Times Magazine</i>.</p>	<p><b>F 2/27: Craft: Cutting Room Floor</b> <i>We'll start by presenting our first drafts, receiving feedback and then back to the editing! Critiques sprinkled in.</i></p> <p><b><u>DUE: First Draft of Short</u></b></p>
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## Week 9: Sharing our stories: PIELC (3/5-3/8)

<p><b>T 2/24: The final countdown</b></p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Rebecca Solnit. "<a href="#">Acts of Hope: Challenging Empire on the World Stage.</a>"</p> <p><b><u>DUE: Final PIELC Presentation</u></b></p>	<p><b>F 2/27: Prepping for our Presentation:</b> <i>We'll run through our final shorts and our PIELC presentations with group feedback.</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b> None!</p> <p><b><u>DUE: Final Draft of short</u></b></p>
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## PIELC Conference 3/5 - 3/7/2015

More details to come. Most likely we'll present on Saturday.

## Week 10: Feedback Loops + Lessons Learned

<p><b>T 2/24: Analysis: Feedback Loops</b> <i>Where do stories live? How do we return stories to their communities?</i></p> <p><b>Readings:</b> Naomi Klein. "<a href="#">Dancing the World into Being: A Conversation with Idle No More's Leanne Simpson.</a>" <i>Yes Magazine</i>.</p> <p><b>Review the following websites:</b> <a href="#">Invisible5</a> <a href="#">Black Gold Boom</a> <a href="#">Faces of Fracking</a></p>	<p><b>F 2/27: Craft: Our stories are bound up together</b> <i>Based on what we've read, talked about and experienced, what lessons have we learned? What best practices can we leave with?</i></p> <p><b><u>DUE: Positionality Paper #2</u></b></p>
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## Assignments:

### Class participation (15%)

Attendance for this class is mandatory. Grades for participation will be dependent on your attendance, your participation and contributions in discussion, and your collaborative efforts in your group project. This class has, for the most part, a light to moderate reading load. This is to ensure that you can finish your readings each week without needing to skim or skip certain parts or pieces. Your participation in class discussions is expected and necessary to facilitate the learning process of everyone in the classroom. Please come prepared with questions and thoughts on class material and other resources you are aware of.

### Weekly journal/memos: 15%

Your journal is a space for you to develop your own ideas in relation to the material. There is no specific format required, and the **minimum expectation is one page, single-spaced, per week**. This should be an informal outlet for thoughts that occur to you throughout class lectures or discussions, while completing reading assignments, and while interacting with media in other contexts. The most important part of the journals is not necessarily to summarize your feelings about the assigned readings, but rather to make larger and broader connections between our class content and your own experiences. The journal should not be taking you too much more than 30 minutes to complete each week.

The overarching theme you are encouraged to explore is **how your own story is bound up with the stories of others**. Lived experience can't be captured by a textbook, and yet is directly related to what we're learning. While reading for class, you might be reminded of an experience that happened long ago, or perhaps earlier today while grabbing lunch. We hope you can begin thinking about these experiences in context of our class content and discussions: What are new observations you have developed? Old opinions you have changed? Why?

We live in a media-saturated world and our challenge is to create media that penetrates, that lingers, that holds people in rapture. A good media-maker has the ability to inspire wonder, to invite viewers/listeners to engage in reflection. For filmmaker Patricio Guzmán, his goal is to bring viewers to a place where “no matter how modest you might be, your personality takes on, lives and gives testimony to a reality that changes yourself a little.” Your journal will be an ongoing documentation of these changes within yourself, but also a thought experiment on how media you will create might change others. What do these small, incremental changes mean to environmental and social justice? How do they contribute to long-term change?

Memos are also a place where you can chart “glimmer moments” – moments or experiences where you might stop in wonderment/puzzlement/surprise as you realize a conversation or an interaction inspires you to feel or think differently about the world. Those moments that move you are likely to move someone else. Don't ignore them!

**Memos are due at the beginning of class on the Friday of each week, with the exceptions of Week 2 and Week 10. Instead, the two parts of your Positionality Essay (described below) will be due these weeks.**

### **Positionality Essay: 25%**

“Who I am is not a noun, it’s a narrative.” - Jan Clausen

This assignment is split into two parts, and is an opportunity for you to examine your own positionality. Positionality refers not only to your vantage point as a consumer/witness or author/creator of media, but also who you are in terms of social location. This can include (but is not limited to) explorations of factors such as what type of setting you grew up in; race or ethnicity; skills and qualities you possess as a person; class; gender; educational/knowledge background; and prior life experiences.

#### **Part I: Due Friday, Jan.16<sup>th</sup> (Week 2) (10%)**

Drawing on the factors listed above, any others you can think of, and also the toolkit activity from class, please explore how these factors might affect your understanding of and engagement with the content of our class, and also related topics outside of the classroom. Some questions you might consider answering include:

- As someone with an interest in storytelling, how might your positionality shape the ways you witness and/or narrate events and issues?
- Does your identity and positionality affect expectations that others may place on you and/or your work?
- Are there barriers that your positionality creates for you? What do you think are some ways to navigate these obstacles?
- Over the course of this term, what aspects of your identity do you hope to pay attention to as you create media pieces?

The paper should be approximately 3 pages, double-spaced, 12 point font.

#### **Part II: Due Friday, Mar. 13<sup>th</sup> (Week 10) (15%)**

Reflect upon the paper you wrote for Part I of this assignment, and evaluate if your idea of your personal positionality has changed throughout the term. Examine how your learning in this class, working with others on the final project, and other life events have impacted you in regards to your understanding of positionality as an idea, but more importantly, your understanding of *your own* positionality. Has your narrative of self and/or how you tell it changed? If so, how? Rethink the questions you answered in the first paper, which may include some of the example questions listed above (under the ‘Part I’ assignment description). Has something from our class and/or our readings affected your previous views? How so? Ultimately, why is your positionality important to understand as a storyteller and story-listener? Looking back to your memos will likely be helpful for writing this assignment.

This paper should be approximately 4 pages, double-spaced, 12 point font.



### **Final Project (45%)**

For your final project, you will work in teams to create a short (3-5 minute) media piece pertaining to pesticide drift issues in Gold Beach, Oregon. The grade for this assignment will be composed of various grades given at different stages of the project, including a project outline, rough cut, final product, and final presentation. For the final presentation, your team will present as a panel at this year's Public Interest Environmental Law Conference (taking place in Week 9); you will present both the media, and also speak about the process of its creation. More information will be provided on this assignment as the term progresses.