

Writing and Politics, Spring 2024

Sketch syllabus for Africana/English 3306
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Overview

Our class will act as the non-partisan editorial group to populate VoteThatJawn.com, its social media, and its youth registration-and-vote event! Your writing and multimedia storytelling and posting combat the toxicity and nihilism that turn off young people. Instead, you bring the party: fun + passion + integrity + wit, could be naughty wit. These make voting a rite of passage to adulthood, kinda cool. In class, online and in person, the core of this project is connection, despite and even because of noise, distraction, and the traumatic facts we take to the polls.

We partner with [PA Youth Vote](http://PAYouthVote.com), because thousands of new voters are in high school; with Committee of Seventy, because Philadelphia's nationally-recognized good-government organization monitors PA voting facts up to the minute; with and with Vote That Jawn's social media manager and a scholar or writer from our reading list, because you'll want to know the people you're working with.

Usually, we take time to write, rewrite, and polish. Now and then, we respond to the news. That's our origin story: My UPenn students responded to the 2018 March for Our Lives with [this feature](http://thisfeature.com) on SafeKidsStories.com—and gave birth to VoteThatJawn.

Workflow and assessment

You will be assessed on two bodies of work: writing we produce in-class, often as a class or in groups; and four individual blogs, essays, or their multimedia equivalent and response papers. We will also create social media posts and tiles. We host one citywide event, "Trend That Jawn." The last one, produced in coordination with Temple students and high schoolers, touched 250,000 individuals.

Work is assigned to be completed in 30 minutes to an hour, three to four days/week. I make the first assessment; then pass your work through our top editor, Becky Sinkler, former editor of *The New York Times Book Review* and Candace Brown, our social media manager, head of Fresh Fruit Media Group. Publishing is the grading standard. You revise until your work is publishable, which crosses the threshold of B+ or better. Revision can be fascinating. No, really.

One text is required: *Walk with Me: A Biography of Fannie Lou Hamer*, by Kate Clifford Larson. Other readings will be mostly short and digital.

Week 1 (01/24): What's Your Jawn?

In class

Course welcome. Guest speaker: Candace Brown, VoteThat Jawn's social media director. Introduction to #VTJ through its platforms, audience engagement numbers; types of posts and reels that garner engagement.

Discussion and intro to each other as writers: Form and content. What do you write?

Homework

- Write: Who are your elected officials? Any surprises? What are your jawns--the issues that drive you to the poll?
- Read: First chapters, *Walk with Me*.

Week 2 (01/31): What's Race Got to Do with It?

In class

Share responses to elected officials prompts and your voting jawns.

Recent U.S. voting history. Introduction to SNCC and the Mississippi Freedom Caucus. What's it got to do with us, here and now?

Intro to #TrendThatJawn. Planning: Goals, event and audience. Create group email invitation. Connect with Prowl/Temple and PA Youth Vote.

Homework

- Write/Revise: "What's your Jawn?" blog; create an accompanying Canva tile.
- Read: Chapters from *Walk with Me: A Biography of Fannie Lou Hamer* by Kate Clifford Larson.

Week 3 (02/07): Philly Phairy Tales

In class

Brainstorm and draft vote-themed fairy tales to augment the collection, including [Sleeping Beauty Gets Out the Vote](#) and [Little Mermaid](#).

Short content: tweets, Canva tiles, bios of participants, registration and voting info.

Criteria for critique.

Homework

- Read your classmates' phairytales. How do they make you feel, not think, when you read them?
- Read assigned *Walk with Me* segments, look through contents, begin to think about voting rights podcast
- Read Einstein [learning physics](#); listen to ["Hidden Brain"](#) podcast on gratitude

Week 4 (02/14): Podcasts; What's Love Got to Do with It?

In class

“What’s love got to do with telling stories?” When you write, you set the problems yourself, just as you set emo problems to solve when you choose relationships.

Podcast visitor TBA. What makes a good podcast? Envisioning a #VoteThatJawn podcast: hosts; guests; topics.

Homework

- Telling a story with sound. Several exercises build toward our audio workshop next week, including connecting with youth curriculum writers/bloggers.
- Read assigned *Walk with Me*: prepare questions for Kate Larson

Week 5 (02/21): Voting Writes the Story

In class

Part 1: Podcast workshop

Part 2: Virtual visit with Kate Clifford Larson, author of *Walk with Me*

Homework

- Record your podcast. Post them on the shared class doc.
- Individual assignments in #TrendThatJawn planning doc

Week 6 (02/28): Plan, plan, plan

In-class: Setting goals for Trend That Jawn. Platforms. Preparing miniblogs for the day; social media toolkit; ready-to-go material for live tweeting/posting during the event. Connecting with Temple and high school partners.

Guests: Jeannine Cook, owner of Harriett’s Books, re: live tweeting, amplifying
Angie Hinton, director, and students of PA Youth Vote

Homework

- Prepare questions for on-the-spot interviewing at #Trend
- Short content: tweets, Canva tiles, bios of participants, registration and voting info
- Social media and invitations

Week 7 (03/06): Spring Break

Week 8 (03/13): One week before Trend That Jawn

In-class

In groups: Scour the run of show for Trend and come up with Plans B,C, and X; create social media toolkits and announcement tiles; assign live tweeting, TikTok, and posting duties during the event. Send, send send. Brief virtual Q&A with Candace Brown.

Homework

- Write/revise questions for on-the-spot interviewing at #Trend; short content: tweets, Canva tiles, bios of participants, registration and voting info

Week 9 (03/20): Trend That Jawn

Day-of-event preparations!

Homework

- Attend Trend in the evening. Response and report notes.

Week 10 (03/27): After Trend

In class

What were our numbers? What is the story of the event? Other versions? So what does it matter? Whom do we tell? Why?

In groups: Curate a Trend “Content Bank.” Thank-you list of partners and folks with whom we corresponded. Divvy up the list; assign for homework.

Homework

- Thank-yous.
- “Favorite Moments” and “Lessons Learned”
- Write a 400-600 word reflection blog, your experience of the event, from attending to helping make it happen; or interview someone you know who watched the livestream; or more prompts to come...

Week 11 (04/03): Week before Primary registration deadline

In class

Last week of registration: on-the-spot interviewing for TikToks. Other re-purposing of IG and website material.

Homework

- Read: [Debunking the Voter Fraud Myth](#) from C70 Elections and Voting Curriculum
- Posting on socials, writing short blogs for last registration push
- Meetings with Ms. Cary to discuss projects, portfolios

Week 12 (04/10): If you would promote that Jawn, then vote that Jawn

In class

Op-eds. Talk to older readers about youth vote; why?

Guest, David Topel

Homework

- Draft your own op-ed, post on [this doc] for feedback from peers.
- Revise op-ed taking into consideration peers’ feedback

- Meetings with Ms. Cary to discuss projects, portfolios

Week 13 (04/17): Week before Election Day

In class

Fact! Talking to youth about finding credible news, challenging confirmation bias, and bursting filter bubbles.

Homework

- Resources: [The News Literacy Project](#) and [RumorGuard](#).
- Using Billy Penn or C70 tools about their candidates and priorities.
- Meetings with Ms. Cary to discuss projects, portfolios

Week 14 (04/24): Group/individual projects workshop

In class

Students present their projects for workshop.

Homework

- Continue working on projects, and revising with classmates' feedback in mind

Week 15 (05/1): Last day of classes

Project presentations, livestreamed.