Issues in American Women’s Literature

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This module is, hopefully, to be incorporated into a new course of my school titled “Women's Literature” for undergraduate students.

It is set for 6 weeks, but could also stretch to 9 weeks according to students’ English proficiency.

It is organized into three units, each centering on a specific issue, related to, but not rigidly, the major three feminist movements in the U.S.
Teachers’ Goals:

- To explore major stages of the feminist movements in the U. S. with all the complexities and diversities, particularly the intersectionality of gender with race, class and sexuality.
- To discuss issues closely related to the students themselves.
- To familiarize Chinese students with key issues, terms, concepts of gender studies, and to help them sharpen sensibility and ability in conducting research from gender perspective.
Learning Goals

- content/knowledge:
  - important American women writers and their works;
  - a historical knowledge of the three waves of the U.S. feminist movements and their respective concerns and arguments, nuances and complexities;
  - key concepts and analytical tools that can be used in more advanced courses, for instance, gender differences and equality, the patriarchy, social construction, othering, womanism, performativity, subjectivity, sexuality, etc.
- **skills and abilities:**
  - the skill to analyze literature and different forms of popular culture from the feminist perspective;
  - critical thinking abilities on issues related to gender issues;
  - the ability to make connections, to contextualize their subjects, and to reflect on their own real issues in life in terms of gender.
Unit 1: “Angel in the House”

- Central reading piece:
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892)
A list of additional materials for students’ presentations:

- Opening and the last chapters from Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (1905)
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper" (1913), in the October 1913 issue of The Forerunner.
- Virginia Woolf, “Professions for Women” (1931)
- Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. “Declaration of Sentiments” (1848)
- Sojourner Truth’s famous speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” to the 1851 Women’s Rights Convention in Ohio
- Pictures from the popular 19th-century women’s magazine Godey’s Lady’s Book, founded in 1898.
Students’ presentation:

- To link one or two of the other pieces to the central piece and the major concerns of the suffrage movement in the U. S.
- For advanced students:
  - they are encouraged to find a piece of their own choice, to analyze the deep-rooted image of “the angel in the house” in American women’s literature, and / or to analyze from a comparative angle to examine that image in Chinese women’s literature as well.
Unit 2: “The Problem That Has No Name”

- **Central pieces:**
  - “The Problem That Has No Name” from Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)
  - Judy Syfers’s “Why I want a wife?” (1971)
The list of the other materials:
- Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour”
- Excerpts from Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*
- Excerpts from Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- Posters of “Rosie the Riveter,” and “Women Could Hold Half the Sky”
- Introduction to Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*
- Movie *Thelma and Louise*
- Clips from the movie *12 Years a Slave* (2013)
- *Silences* by Tillie Olsen
Students’ presentation:

- To link one or two of the other pieces to the central pieces, the major concerns of the housewife issue and the second-wave feminist movement.
- For advanced students:
  - they are encouraged to find a piece of their own choice, to analyze the issue from the perspectives of race and class, and again to compare the differences in China.
Unit 3: “Where Are We Going”

- **Central piece:** Joyce Carol Oates’s “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”
- **Other pieces:**
  - Kate Chopin’s “The Storm”
  - “A Black Feminist Statement by the Combahee River Collective,”
  - Alice Walker’s “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens”
  - Excerpts from Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*
  - Excerpts from Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*
  - Movie *The Hours*
Students’ presentation:

- To link one or two of the other pieces to the central piece and the major concerns of the third-wave feminist movement.
- For advanced students:
  - they are encouraged to find a piece of their own choice, to analyze how women have made progress in certain ways and how they are still struggling, and to discuss the issue of “post-feminism.”
Advice to teachers:

- The teacher will ask the students to read the central piece(s) before class and link it to one other piece in their preparation for a class presentation of 10 minutes, which will focus on analysis rather than general introduction of the materials.
This module will be conducted for beginners in a lecture form plus students’ presentations. But a certain percentage of reading responses could be required on Blackboard.

For advanced students, this module can be conducted in a seminar form.
Suggested formative assessment:

- Attendance: 10%
- Class participation: 10%
- Reading responses: 20%
- Presentation: 20%
- Final exam (in short essay form): 40%