

Lesson Plan for Anida Yoeu Ali's "Excuse Me, AmeriKa"

ENG 102 Writing through Literature

Keywords: Immigration, Identity, Assimilation

Pre-Reading: Anida Yoeu Ali's "Excuse Me, AmeriKa" and an excerpt of Eric Tang's Introduction to *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the NYC Hyperghetto*. A more advanced course could read the entire chapter. I also ask students to read the definitions of alliteration, tone, and imagery from a course packet I provide.

Pre-Writing: I require students to respond to the reading and poem on WordPress. My class discusses what they feel is the main theme of the poem is and how the Tang excerpt influences their reading or reaction to the poem. Another option could be to give them a specific quote from Tang and ask them to apply this information to the poem.

Presentation: Two students are assigned to create a presentation on Ali's biography and historical information on the Khmer Rouge Regime. I help students find appropriate academic sources to complete their presentation. Having students present this information gives students relevant biographical/historical information to help them understand the poem and for later writing.

Class Plan:

1. Student presentation on Ali and Khmer Rouge—10 min
2. Discuss assigned literary term definitions.
3. Discuss poem—Let's start with a formalist reading of the poem. What lines stand out to you as important? Can we find examples of our literary terms represented in the poem? How does imagery and alliteration help us better understand Ali's experience of being a refugee? About Asian stereotypes? About the process of assimilation? What is the tone of the poem? How does the tone of the poem enhance its message? —15 min
4. Groupwork: Thinking about the biographical and historical information we learned in the presentation, especially the Khmer Rouge fatalities and the influence of the U.S. on Cambodian politics, are there lines from the poem that address Ali's experience of specifically being a Cambodian refugee? Write up why your group chose this specific line. Share lines/analysis from each group.

Excuse Me, AmeriKa

Anida Yoeu Ali/Esguerra (2002)

excuse me, Amerika I'm confused?
you tell me to lighten up
but what you really mean is whiten up
you wish to wash me out,
melt me in your cauldron
excuse me, if I tip your melting pot
spill the shades onto your streets
I DON'T WANT TO LOSE MY COLOR.

you wonder why I get so angry
and don't trust me when I claim it's your fault
excuse me, Amerika,
you pushed for my paper permanency,
shipped us as cargo for suburban missionaries:
 "refugees aboard, handle with care,
 please provide help for the godless children seeking refuge"
from a land fighting for your creed
a country in distress armed by your congress
rampaged and pillaged
and suddenly my skin stretches on silver screens
the killing fields for your hollywood hype
excuse me, Amerika.
I have tried it here and made this my home.
BUT YOU NEVER WANTED ME HERE.

9 digits to divvy up my new found freedom
a hyphenated identity, misconstructured name
a divided soul – asian american
 a hybrid woman
SLASHED, DASHED, CAPPED, AND LOWER CASED IN LABELS
contaminated by diction –
pricked by vultures of bastard tongues
you mispronounce my pain,
the sting heard on roll call days
daily friction – names slip off teachers' tongues
sounding like slaughtered soldiers
caught in battalion battlefields
excuse me, for getting so angry but
YOU CAN'T EVEN SAY MY FUCKING NAME!

still you shuffle my anger aside
want me to bite my lips and watch my words,
yet you cut me with your thoughts.
your stories frame me in fiction
recreated for ideal themes
squeezed my mind for the minor myth
that molds me into your major model
gave me seductive sex appeal to steal your virgin soldiers
and drew me dragon claws to kill your unlucky sons
excuse me if I get too angry.
YOU SPREAD LIES MEANT TO SPREAD MY LEGS.

excuse me, if I have learned to master your language,
sharpen my tongue, own my own words

and call my pain, ANGER!

excuse me, if I get angry
watching my parents wither in work day cycles
while you steam roll over their dreams
THEY drown in blood and sweat
for 15 minute breaks and overtime meals
the factory whistle blows an awful stink
that stains my father's blue collared shirt
steel toe shoes cover callous feet
that stand proud to be the backbones of this America
for jobs 'real Americans' never wanted
my father's skin sweats stories
my mother's hands hold up hope
I AM ANGRY FOR THEIR SACRIFICE.
I AM ANGRY FOR THEIR PAIN
I AM ANGRY for the lost stories and forgotten faces
drowning in this land of immigrant pool
I AM ANGRY for the violence that bleeds onto your streets.

excuse you, Amerika
while I scratch your name with 3Ks,
mark X for your xenophobic tendencies,
scrape the violence off your scalp,
and ask you why?
Why are you so angry, Amerika?
you whip out wise cracks – attack the defenseless
 flashing the superior color of your badge
you beat us down – blameless as victims remain nameless
 bashing the heads of all our vincent chins
you serve violence – a beating for culture's sake
 fistfights to finish a Denny's meal
you dig graves for forgotten faces
steal lives for petty skin crimes
bury our dead with bullet wounds
slay the living with foreign stares
WHY DON'T YOU STOP HATING ME.
WHY DON'T YOU STOP KILLING ME!